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MARCEL PROUST

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# MARCEL PROUST

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## *A SELECTION FROM HIS MISCELLANEOUS WRITINGS*

*chosen and translated by*

GERARD HOPKINS

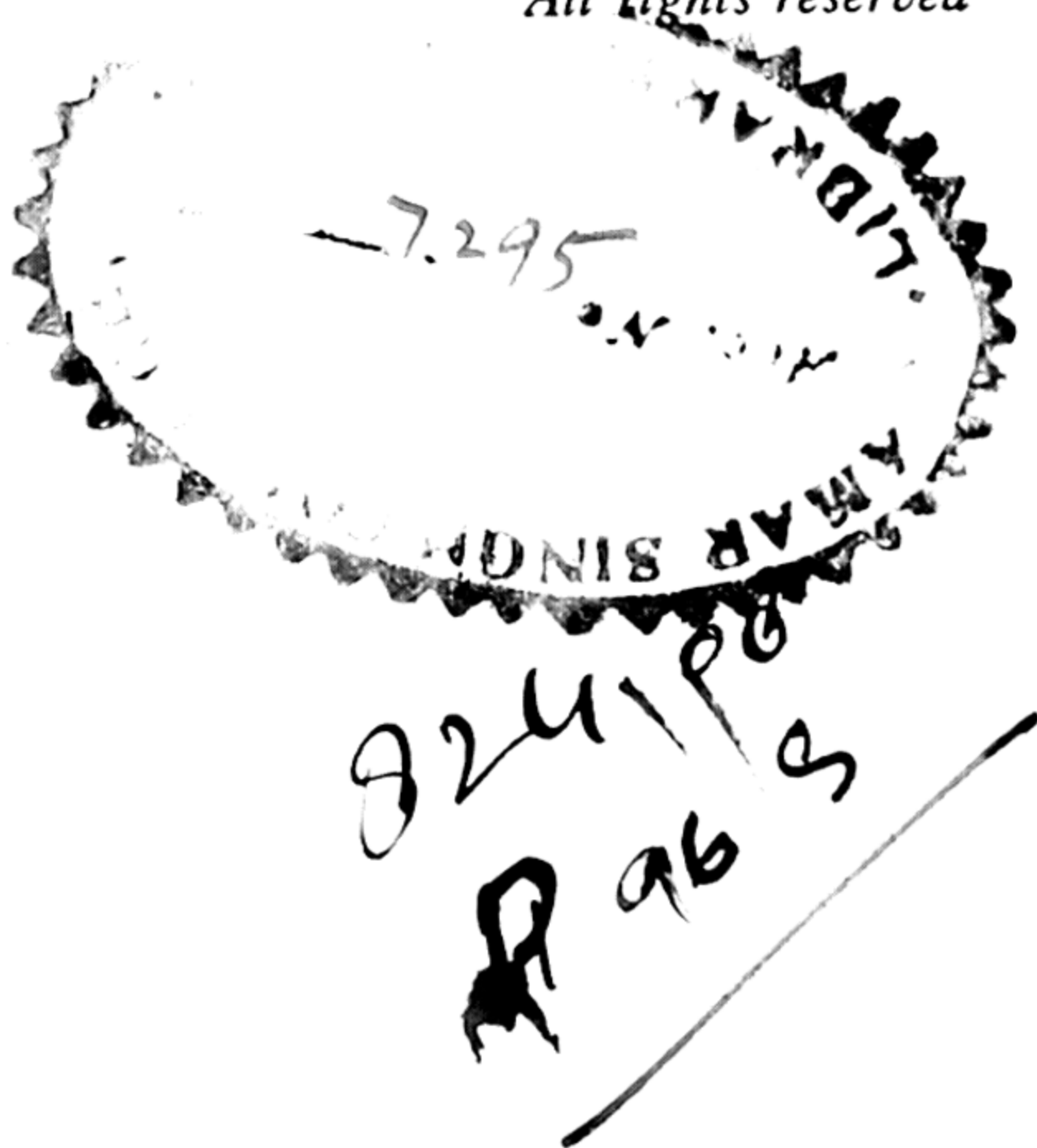
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## PREFACE

BY GERARD HOPKINS

IT is tempting to regard Marcel Proust as the last of the Romantics. But the temptation must be resisted. No poet, whether in words, painting or music can be so described, because the romantic attitude is a permanent element in human nature. The specific manifestations of it are born, come to flower and wither, but always the spirit itself emerges in some new form not easy, at times, to recognise. Proust's great novel was the culmination of a movement that began early in the nineteenth century, with Chateaubriand, and, flowing, ebbing, gathering force and slackening speed, came to a head in the *Symbolistes* at the century's end. *Le Temps Retrouvé* marked a full, if temporary, stop. But already, in their early stirrings, Da-Da and Surréalism were preparing a fresh romantic onslaught upon the marble stronghold of classic solidity.

There has been a tendency, at least in the English-speaking countries, to underestimate, if not to ignore, this aspect of Proust's genius. At first, it is true, the lyric quality of *Swann* was what impressed and attracted an astonished public. But, little by little, attention became riveted upon its author's work as a social chronicler, an analyst of the human heart, an interpreter of civilisation in decay. In the numerous works of comment and appraisal that have poured from the press since Proust's death, Combray has been swallowed up in Paris. This may have been due, in part, outside France, to a curious failure on the part of his English translator to render the precise implications of his choice of title. Mr Scott-Moncrieff, as a rule so sensitive to words, so intelligently alive to subtleties, gave regrettable currency to a false phrase. *Memory of Things Past* is precisely what Proust's vast and undulating composition is *not*. He used the term *Recherche* with deliberate, and highly

## PREFACE

romantic, intention. Memory he always stigmatised as a rational activity which, where more than fact was involved, must be sterile. What he set himself to do was to seek something that was not the past but the eternal present. What he wanted was not to remember things forgotten but to recreate things living, but, for the moment, lost, and for this purpose he made use of certain stimuli which had the power of bringing from the regions of the subconscious the whole panorama of an indestructible reality. Memory recalls only what has been objective. *Recherche*, as he meant the word to be understood, laid bare subjective truth.

That this preoccupation with the deeply personal, this conviction that beauty and the real are in the eye of the beholder, was no sudden conviction will at once be apparent to all readers of the pieces offered in the present volume. The writing of most of them dates from the period 1900-1913, that is to say, from the years immediately preceding the completion of the first version of *Du Côté de Chez Swann*. It has been, and still, to some extent, is, fashionable to dismiss Proust's early essays in literature as relatively worthless. Even as late as 1947 the contributor of the article on Proust to that admirable volume *A Dictionary of European Literature* could say that the pieces contained in *Pastiches et Mélanges* are 'no more than the exercises of a fastidious, cultivated dilettante'. If the translation and publication in English of the best of these serves to prove the inadequacy of such a judgment, much will have been accomplished. It is on these two volumes that I have chiefly drawn, the sole exceptions being two Prefaces of a later date. But certain omissions have been forced upon me. The actual *Pastiches*—amounting to nine—have had to be excluded, and this, especially in view of what Proust has to say about parody in his essay on Flaubert, is unfortunate. But the understanding and appreciation of parody depends upon familiarity with an original, and such familiarity cannot be expected of those readers for whom a translation is necessary. Only the existence of an 'authoritative' and generally accepted English version of all the major French writers, could make possible an adequate



## PREFACE

understanding and appreciation of the parodist's work. To translate the deliberately exaggerated and distorted presentation of an author's style, of, in fact, a parody, would be infinitely more difficult than the straight translation of an original text, however involved, and no attempt has here been made to tackle the problem. The other major omission is that of Proust's 'portraits' of the Paris salons with which he was familiar. So recondite are the references, so unfamiliar, to foreign eyes, the scene, that it has been thought better to ignore them. Their absence is, in one way, fortunate, because, as a result of it, Proust the social chronicler is altogether kept from a book which is mostly concerned with Proust the romantic, and so makes possible a homogeneity of tone which the two original volumes of miscellanea did not possess. Where, on other pieces, sentence of banishment has been passed, the criterion has been one of relative excellence.

Most of the inclusions need no justification. One of the most important of them, the first of two pieces entitled *Days of Reading*, is not only a fascinating experiment in method, a preliminary sketch of what was to reach perfection in *Swann*, but enunciates, too, one of the main tenets of Proust's romantic dogma—the proper use of books as stimuli to self-discovery, and not as the means of acquiring and possessing objective truth. Experiment, too, is what gives value to the shorter contributions—*Sunlight on a Balcony*, *White May*; *Pink May*, *The Village Church* etc—all of which show Proust blazing a path to Combray, and already deeply concerned with a number of themes which he later treated at length. They are important as anticipations, and they have genuine charm. The essays on Flaubert and Baudelaire give evidence of Proust's critical sense and deep literary erudition, and contain much that is of interest to students of his psychology. So, too, with the Prefaces, which soon break from their official anchorage and drift into fascinating backwaters of revelation and remembrance. The two long studies of Ruskin may seem to need a more reasoned defence, especially the first of them, which contains so much quotation that the English reader may feel faintly

## PREFACE

aggrieved at the rather overpowering presence of his countryman. But the influence of Ruskin on Proust was so great that it seemed essential to give it fair representation. Moreover, the articles contain a first statement of that attitude to art from which Proust never wholly departed, and show, too, to what an extent he came under the influence of Ruskin's prose style. Much of the loose undulation of his periods, the entanglement of parentheses, the sprinkled plethora of punctuation, is seen to derive from the example of his English master, and it is amusing, as well as instructive, to observe how difficult it is, when the French text is given in translation, to tease out the Proustian from the Ruskinian idiom.

It should not be necessary to point out the difficulties which Proust presents to the translator. It would have been comparatively simple to break up his great sea-swells of phrase into a succession of neat, land-locked lagoons, but that would have been, by simplifying the problem, to falsify the result. As with all great writers, Proust's manner and matter are indivisible. It must be remembered that his first French readers found his style strange and abhorrent. Only by giving the English reader some idea of the difficulties they encountered is it possible to offer anything approaching a true version of some of the most remarkable passages of sustained prose writing of modern times. I am deeply conscious of my shortcomings, but, at the same time, somewhat complacently satisfied to think that, if I have made things harder for my readers, I have, at least, not made them easy for myself.

IN MEMORY  
OF A MASSACRE OF  
CHURCHES

I

THE CHURCHES SAVED

*The Towers of Caen : The Cathedral of Lisieux*

*Days on the Road*

BECAUSE I had started fairly late in the afternoon, there was no time to be lost if I wanted to reach, before nightfall, the house of my parents which stood half-way between Lisieux and Louviers. To right, to left, and ahead, the car windows, which I kept closed, produced the effect of, as it were, displaying under glass the lovely September day which, even to the gazer in the open air, showed as something seen through a kind of translucent substance. No sooner did the old pot-bellied houses, leaning to one another across the road, see us in the distance, than they rushed to meet us with a proffered gift of scant, fresh-blooming roses, or displayed with pride young hollyhocks which they had tended, only to be out-topped by the stripling blooms. Here and there was one that leaned affectionately upon a growing pear-tree, thinking, in the blind self-deception of old age, to prop that on which it depended for support, pressing the trunk tightly to its stricken heart, in which now, motionless and evermore embedded, was set the tracery of frail, impassioned branches. Soon the road made a bend, and, the bank of grass that was its right-hand verge becoming lower, I saw the plain of Caen, though not the city which, though it lay within the extended view, could not, for distance, yet be seen, nor even its existence guessed. Only the twin bell-towers of St Etienne,



rising in isolation from the dead level of the plain, as though lost in the spreading acreage of fields, seemed set to scale the sky. Another moment, and there were three of them, St Peter's having joined the other two. Brought thus together into a cragged, three-cornered peak, they stood out, as often do, in Turner's pictures, the monasteries or manors from which the study is named, though in the vast setting of sky and fields and river, they occupy as little space as, and seem scarcely less episodic and ephemeral than, the rainbow, the late afternoon light, and the little country girl who, in the foreground, trips with a basket in either hand along the road. The minutes passed: our speed increased: but still before us stood those solitary shapes, like birds perched motionless upon the plain, and caught in a gleam of sun. Then, suddenly, as the distance frayed apart like a mist which, melting, reveals, complete in every detail, some object which till then has been invisible, the towers of La Trinité appeared, or rather, one tower only, so precisely did it mask its neighbour. Then it moved aside, the other came forward, and the pair stood new-aligned. Finally, one laggard belfry, with a sudden, daring twist, set itself fair and square before the other two. And now, between this multiplicity of towers—the distant light touching their steep-pitched tiles with smiling radiance—the city, aping at its lower level, their nimbleness, though falling short of their achievement, took sudden form and began to develop in a mounting figure, a complex, clear-cut fugue of roofs.

I had asked my driver to stop for a moment in front of the towers of St Etienne; but, remembering how long we had taken to approach them when, earlier, they had seemed so close, I had just taken my watch from my pocket to see how many minutes would yet remain before we reached our goal, when the car turned a corner and drew up beneath them. For a long time they had been unattainable, resisting every effort of our mechanised advance to break through the separating distance, so that the car had seemed to be sliding fecklessly along the road, while the space between us and them had stayed unchanged. It was only in the last few seconds that we had

## A MASSACRE OF CHURCHES

realised to the full how fast we had been moving. Like giants whelming us with the vastness of their height, they flung themselves so recklessly before us, that we had only just enough time to keep ourselves from crashing into the porch.

We resumed our journey. Already we had left Caen far behind us. For a few seconds the city had borne us company, but then had disappeared, until only the two belfries of St Etienne, and the single tower of St Peter's remained adrift on the horizon, moving in a mute adieu their sun-touched vanes. At moments, one or other effaced itself, that the other two might catch of us a fleeting glimpse. Soon I could see but two. Then, for the last time, they turned and twisted, like hinged and golden emblems, to disappear at last from view. Often, since then, travelling at sunset through the plain of Caen, I have seen them, sometimes far off, so that they seemed no more than painted flowers upon the background of the sky that arched above the low lines of the fields; sometimes at rather closer range, when, joined by St Peter's belfry, they looked like three young maidens of some ancient legend, abandoned in a darkling solitude. And, while I journeyed on, I would see them seek to follow me with fearful steps, only, after a few awkward movements and uncouth stumbles, to draw their noble shapes into a clustered knot, and slip one behind the other, until they were no more than a single mass of shadow, sweet and patient, sinking into the uprush of the night.

I was beginning to give up all hope of arriving at Lisieux in time to be sure of reaching my parents' house, they, fortunately, not having been warned of my arrival, when, about sundown, we found ourselves abruptly on a hill, at the bottom of which, in a basin turned blood-crimson by the sun, to which we raced at speed, I saw Lisieux, which, hastening ahead, had hurriedly set up its crumbling houses and chimneys stained with red. In an instant everything was just where it should be, and when, some few seconds later, we drew up at the corner of the Rue aux Fèvres, the old houses with their fine shafted timbers holding aloft on saints' and demons' heads a flowering wealth of windows seemed not to have changed at all since the fifteenth



century. A breakdown kept us in Lisieux until darkness had fallen. I wished to refresh my memory, before leaving, of some of the carved foliage on the exterior of the cathedral which Ruskin mentions, but the dim lamps which served to light the streets of the town were absent from the square, and Notre Dame was barely visible. Still, I walked forward, wishing at least to touch the famous trees of stone with which the porch is planted, and between whose nobly sculptured leaves once moved, perhaps, the nuptial pomp of Henry II of England and Eleanor of Guyenne. But just as I was feeling my way towards them, they became bathed in a sudden radiance. The great vista of pillared trunks strode from the blackness, the broad modelling of their chiselled leaves standing out in bright relief upon the shadowy background. My driver, the resourceful Agostinelli, paying to ancient stones the tribute of the present, whose gift of life served to make easy the reading of old lessons, was focussing upon each section in turn of the porch I wished to see, the bright beams of his headlights.<sup>1</sup> When I got back to the car, I saw a little group of children, drawn thither by their curiosity, bending above the lamps their curly heads, which quivered in the unearthly glare, so that they looked like some little Nativity scene of angels, projected, as it were, from the cathedral in a beam of light.

By the time we left Lisieux it was quite dark. My driver had put on a voluminous rubber cloak, and, round his head, a species of hood, which, swathing the fulness of his young and beardless face, gave him the appearance, as we plunged ever more quickly through the night, of some pilgrim, or, rather, of some nun, dedicated to the service of the God of Speed. From time to time—a St Cecilia, improvising ethereal themes—he touched his keyboard, and drew sweet sounds from the

<sup>1</sup> I could not have foreseen, when I wrote these lines, that, seven or eight years later, this young man would ask to be allowed to type one of my books; would learn to fly, under the assumed name of Marcel Swann (thus fondly associating my own baptismal name and that of one of my characters), and would die at twenty-six in an aeroplane crash off Antibes.



## A MASSACRE OF CHURCHES

instrument concealed in the car, whose gift of music, though continuous, we note only at such moments as the change of tone, which is the change of gear, comes audibly to us: an abstract music, so to speak, all symbol and all number, which sets the mind thinking of that harmony which, so men say, the spheres produce as they spin through space. But for most of the time, he sat there with his hand upon the wheel—the instrument by which he steered, and like enough for comparison to those instruments of martyred consecration borne by the Apostles who stand against the columns of the Saint-Chapelle in Paris, to the emblem carried by St Bénédict, and, in general, to every stylised form of wheel in the art of the Middle Ages. He seemed to use it but rarely, so motionless was his pose, but held it as he might have done some symbolic object with which convention ordained that he should be associated. In just such a way do saints in cathedral porches hold, one an anchor, one a wheel, a harp, a scythe, a gridiron, a hunting horn, a paint brush. But if these attributes were, in general, intended to recall the art which each, in life, had excellently practised, they sometimes served as a memorial of the nature of their final torment. How dearly I wished that the steering-wheel of this, my young mechanic, might forever symbolise his talent, and not prefigure the nature of his passion!

We had to stop in a village where, for the space of a few moments, I figured for its inhabitants as that traveller who ceased to exist when railways became general, and has now been resuscitated by the motor-car, the figure to whom, in Flemish paintings, the maid of the Inn is seen handing a stirrup-cup, the man one sees in the landscapes of Cuyp, stopping to ask his way of some passer-by—though, as Ruskin says, his mere appearance should have warned the traveller that he was incapable of giving any information—the horseman who, in the *Fables* of Lafontaine, gallops in sunlight and in wind, wrapped in a warm cloak when autumn comes, and the ‘traveller would be well advised to take precautions’—the ‘cavalier’ who, today, scarcely exists at all in reality, though sometimes we see him still cantering at low tide along the shore when the sun is

low (a ghost of the past, taking momentary form in the oncoming dark), turning the scene of sea and sand to a 'Marine Study' duly dated and signed, a tiny figure added, it would seem, by Lingelbach, Vouvermans or Adrian Van der Velde, to satisfy the taste for anecdote and 'human interest' of those rich merchants of Haarlem who were the patrons of the fine arts, to a seascape by William Van der Velde or Ruysdael. But the most splendid gift bestowed by the automobile on this modern traveller is that of a splendid independence, by virtue of which he can set out at any hour he pleases, and stop when and where he will. Those will understand my meaning to whom a sudden wind brings an irresistible desire to escape upon its back to the ocean, where they may see, not dead village cobbles flagged in vain by the tempest, but great waves in a surge, prepared to give it blow for blow and roar for roar; those, above all, who know what it means at evening, to dread being shut into a room with their misery, realising that a whole night lies before them. What happiness it is when one has wrestled long hours with agony, and is just on the point of going upstairs, to be able to say, stilling the beatings of one's heart: 'No, I won't go up, but have them saddle my horse, or bring the car round'; and then, all night long, to flee, leaving behind the villages where pain would have been a suffocating incubus, where one notes its presence under each little sleeping roof, while one speeds along the roads, unrecognised by its watching eyes and safe from its attack.

But my car had stopped at the corner of a hollow lane, before a door smothered in roses and fading iris. We had reached my parents' house. The driver sounded his horn to call the gardener to open the gate; that horn whose strident and monotonous note we find displeasing, but which, like all material things, can turn into something beautiful once it has been touched with sentiment. In my parents' hearts it called forth a happy echo, coming to them like some unexpected word . . . 'I rather think I heard . . . it must be he, it can't be anybody else!' They get up, light a candle, sheltering its flame against the draught from the door which, in their impatience, they have already opened,



## A MASSACRE OF CHURCHES

while, at the far end of the park, the horn whose joyous and now almost human sound they can no longer misconstrue, sends out continuously a level, changeless summons that is like the obsession of their happiness to come, urgent and repetitive, like their waxing, anxious hopes. And I thought how, in *Tristan and Isolde* (first in the second act when Isolde waves her scarf for a signal, and then in the third when the ship arrives) it is, in the first instance by means of a strident repetition, indefinite and increasingly rapid, of two notes—the peculiar succession of which is sometimes, in the world of undisciplined noise, the result of mere chance; in the second, through the growing intensity, the insatiable monotony of the thin, reedy tune played by a poor shepherd-boy, that Wagner, by that very abdication of creative power which is sheer genius, has expressed the greatest sense of expectation waiting on happiness that has ever filled the human heart.

## 2

### DAYS OF PILGRIMAGE

*Ruskin at Notre-Dame d'Amiens, at Rouen, etc*<sup>1</sup>

My wish is to arouse in the reader the desire to spend, and to give him the means of spending, a day at Amiens on a sort of Ruskin pilgrimage. It seemed unnecessary to suggest to him that he should go to Florence or to Venice when Ruskin has devoted a whole volume to Amiens.<sup>2</sup> In this way, too, it seems

<sup>1</sup> Part of this Study was published in the *Mercure de France* as an Introduction to my translation of *The Bible of Amiens*. I wish to express sincere thanks to Monsieur Alfred Vallette, Editor of the *Mercure*, for his gracious permission to reprint that Introduction here. It was, and is, dedicated, as a tribute of admiration and of gratitude, to Monsieur Léon Daudet.

<sup>2</sup> Here according to Mr Collingwood, are the circumstances in which

to me, should be celebrated the 'Cult of Heroes', in spirit, I mean, and in truth. We visit the spot where a great man was born, the spot where he died: but does he not dwell still more surely in those that he most admired, and the beauty of which is what we love in his books?

We honour with a fetishism, which is but illusion, a tomb where lies only what of Ruskin was not himself, yet do not go to kneel before those stones of Amiens from which he drew his thought, which keep it still, like that tomb in England where, of a poet whose body was burned, there lies—plucked from the flames by another poet—naught but the heart.<sup>1</sup>

Ruskin came to write this book. ' . . . He had not been abroad since the spring of 1877, and in August 1880 felt able to travel again. He went for a tour among the northern French cathedrals, staying at old haunts—Abbeville, Amiens, Beauvais, Chartres, Rouen—and then returned with Mr A. Severn and Mr Brabazon to Amiens, where he spent the greater part of October. He was writing a new book *The Bible of Amiens*—which was to be to the *Seven Lamps* what *St Mark's Rest* was to *The Stones of Venice*. Before he returned, the Secretary of the Chesterfield Art Club had written to ask him to address the students . . . Though he did not feel able to lecture to strangers at Chesterfield, he visited his old friends at Eton, on November 6th, 1880, to give an address on Amiens. For once he forgot his MS, but the lecture was no less brilliant and interesting. It was practically the first chapter of his new work, *The Bible of Amiens*—itself intended as the first volume of *Our Fathers Have Told Us: Sketches of the History of Christendom, etc.* The distinctly religious tone of the work was noted as marking, if not a change, a strong development of a tendency which had been strengthening for some time past . . . ' Collingwood: *The Life and Work of John Ruskin*. In connection with the sub-title of *The Bible of Amiens* recalled by Mr Collingwood (*Sketches of the History of Christendom for Boys and Girls who have been held at its Fonts*), I would remark how closely it resembles others of Ruskin's sub-titles, for instance that of *Mornings in Florence (Being Simple Studies on Christian Art for English Travellers)*, and still more, that of *St Mark's Rest (A History of Venice written for the help of the few Travellers who still care for Her Monuments)*.

<sup>1</sup> Shelley's heart, which was snatched from the flames by Hunt in Lord Byron's presence during the process of cremation. Monsieur André Lebey (himself the author of a sonnet on Shelley's death) has



## A MASSACRE OF CHURCHES

No doubt that snobbery which gives a spurious air of reason to everything it touches, has not yet (at least for Frenchmen) laid its finger on such æsthetic excursions, and so preserved them from ridicule. Tell your friends that you are going to Bayreuth to hear a Wagner opera, or to Amsterdam for an exhibition of Flemish Primitives, and they will say how sorry they are that they cannot go with you. But mention that you are off to watch a storm off the Pointe du Raz, to Normandy for the spectacle of apple trees in bloom, to Amiens to see a statue that Ruskin loved, and they will scarce be able to suppress a smile. Still, I have a hope that, when you have read what I have to say, you too will visit Amiens. When one works with the object of pleasing others, one may quite possibly not succeed, but there is always a chance that something done to satisfy oneself may be of interest to one other person at least. I find it incredible that there are not, somewhere, people who find a certain amount of pleasure in what has given me so much. For no one is unique, and, fortunately for that sympathy and understanding which are among the great happinesses of life, our different individualities are worked on a woof that is made of all mankind. If it were possible to subject the soul, like matter, to analysis, one would discover that beneath the seeming diversity of spirits as of things, there are but very few simple agglomerations and

sent me an interesting correction of the story. It was not Hunt, it appears, but Trelawny who rescued Shelley's heart from the pyre, not without sustaining serious burns on the hand. I am sorry not to be able to print the text of Monsieur Lebey's curious letter. It contains the following passage from the Memoirs of Trelawny. 'Byron asked me to preserve the skull for him; but remembering that he had formerly used one as a drinking-cup, I was determined Shelley's should not be so profaned.' The previous evening, while they were identifying Williams' body, Byron had said to Trelawny: 'Let me see the jaw. I can recognise anyone by the teeth, with whom I have talked.' But in reading Trelawny's account, one must always make allowances for the toughness which Childe Harold deliberately assumed when talking to the Corsair, and remember that, a few lines further on, Trelawny, describing the burning of Shelley, says: 'Byron could not face this scene, he withdrew to the beach, and swam off to the *Bolivar*.'

irreducible elements, and that what we believe to be our personality is made up of very common substances which are to be found scattered here and there all through the Universe.

The details which writers give us in their books of the places they have loved, are often so vague, that there hangs about our attempted pilgrimages an air of uncertainty and hesitation, a sense of uneasiness lest they be illusory. Like the character in Edmond de Goncourt's book, who set out to find a grave unmarked by any cross, we are reduced to paying our devotions 'haphazard'. That cause of irritation you will never find in Ruskin, and especially not when he is writing of Amiens. You run no risk of spending an afternoon in the town without being able to find him in the cathedral. He is ready waiting for you at the station, intent on making quite certain, not only how capable you are of appreciating the beauties of Notre Dame, but what train it is that you mean to catch, and the exact number of hours that you can give to sight-seeing. He will not rest content with merely showing you the street that leads to the cathedral, but will point out various alternative lines of approach according as you are, or are not, pressed for time. And because he is anxious that you shall follow his guidance with that freedom of spirit which is the gift of a body satisfied, he may, perhaps, make it quite clear that, like those saints who are your especial favourites, he is not one to disdain the 'sober' pleasures, and preparatory to taking you to the church, will first guide your steps to a pastry-cook's shop.<sup>1</sup> Arriving in

<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, his admirable portrait of St Martin in Book I of *The Bible of Amiens*. 'He . . . helps, forgives and cheers (companionable even to the loving-cup). The stuffing of your Martinmas goose is fragrant in his nostrils, and sacred to him the last kindly rays of departing summer.'

There is about the meals evoked by Ruskin something of ceremony. 'St Martin was dining one day at the highest of tables in the terrestrial globe—namely, with the Emperor and Empress of Germany, with the Emperor, of course, sitting next him on his left—Empress opposite him on his right: everything orthodox . . . making himself generally agreeable to the company; not in the least a John Baptist sort of a Saint.' . . . The orthodoxy to which Ruskin here alludes, seems to have had



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Amiens in an æsthetic mood, you find yourself already welcomed

nothing in common with the rules and regulations insisted upon by those terrible hosts, those excessive formalists, whose type is perpetuated in these verses from St Matthew: 'The king saw there a man which had not on a wedding-garment. And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding-garment? And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness. . .' But to return to this conception of a saint who 'wastes no breath in disagreeable exhortations', Ruskin seems not to have been alone in seeing his favourite saints in this light. Note how different even George Eliot's simple clergymen, or Carlyle's prophets, are from that St Firmin who behaved like a fanatic in the streets of Amiens, crying, and creating an uproar, insulting, exhorting, persuading, baptising, etc, etc. See what Carlyle says of Knox: 'Withal, unexpectedly enough, this Knox has a vein of drollery in him; which I like much, in combination with his other qualities . . . an honest-hearted, brotherly man; brother to the high, brother also to the low; sincere in his sympathy with both. He had his pipe of Bordeaux, too, we find, in that old Edinburgh house of his; a cheery, social man, with faces that loved him. They go far wrong who think this Knox was a gloomy, spasmodic, shrieking fanatic. Not at all: he is one of the solidest of men. Practical, cautious, hopeful, patient', etc. Burns, too, was 'usually the gayest of speech; a fellow of infinite frolic, laughter, sense and heart. . . He is not a mourning man. . . All kinds of gifts, from the gracefulest utterances of courtesy to the highest power of passionate speech', etc . . . and Mahomet: ' . . . A serious, sincere character; yet amiable, cordial, companionable, jocose even; a good laugh in him withal.' Carlyle loves, too, to write of Luther's laughter.

See, too, George Eliot: Mr Irwine in *Adam Bede*, Mr Gilfil in *Scenes of Clerical Life*, Mr Farebrother in *Middlemarch*, etc.

'I am obliged to admit that he (Mr Gilfil) said good-bye to Dame Fripp without asking her why she had not been to church, or making the slightest effort for her spiritual edification. But the next day he ordered his man David to take her a great piece of bacon', etc . . . 'You already suspect that the vicar did not shine in the more spiritual functions of his office; indeed, the utmost I can say for him in this respect is, that he performed those functions with undeviating attention to brevity and dispatch.' He forgot to take off his spurs before going into the pulpit, and never preached what might be called sermons at all. For all that, never had vicar been so beloved of his flock, nor exercised upon them a better influence. ' . . . The farmers relished his society particularly, for he could not only smoke his pipe, and season the details of parish affairs with abundance of caustic

on its threshold, for there are many who come with very different intentions.

The intelligent English traveller, in this century, is aware that, half-way between Boulogne and Paris, there is a railway-station, into which his train, in its relaxing speed,

jokes . . . To ride backwards and forwards . . . was the old gentleman's chief relaxation, now his hunting days were over . . . It was not to the Shepperton farmers only that Mr Gilfil's society was acceptable; he was a welcome guest at some of the best houses in that part of the country . . . If you had seen him conducting Lady Sitwell in to dinner' (as, a while back, St Martin the Empress of Germany), 'or had heard him talking to her with quaint yet graceful gallantry', etc . . . 'Most frequently, indeed, by the side of his own sitting room fire, smoking his pipe, and maintaining the pleasing antithesis of dryness and moisture by an occasional sip of gin and water . . . ' (*Mr Gilfil's Love Story*) . . . 'As for the clergyman, Mr. Gilfil, an excellent old gentleman, who smoked very long pipes and preached very short sermons . . . ' (*The Sad Fortunes of the Rev Amos Barton*).

' . . . He (Mr Irwine) really had no very lofty aims, no theological enthusiasm . . . and would have thought it a mere loss of time to talk in a doctrinal and awakening manner to "old feyther Taft", or even to Chad Cranage, the blacksmith . . . He was neither laborious, nor obviously self-denying, nor very copious in alms-giving, and his theology, you perceive, was lax. His mental palate, indeed, was rather pagan . . . (but) . . . he had that charity which has sometimes been lacking to very illustrious virtue—he was tender to other men's failings, and unwilling to impute evil', etc . . . 'If you had met him that June afternoon, riding on his grey cob, with his dogs running beside him—portly, upright, manly, with a good-natured smile on his finely-turned lips . . . ' etc . . . 'Mr Irwine's influence in his parish was a more wholesome one than that of the zealous Mr Ryde, who came there twenty years afterwards, when Mr Irwine had been gathered to his fathers. It is true Mr Ryde insisted strongly on the doctrines of the Reformation . . . and was severe in rebuking the aberration of the flesh', etc . . . 'Now, Mester Irwine was as different as could be: as quick!—he understood what you meant in a minute . . . and he behaved as much like a gentleman to the farmers', etc . . . 'No one has ever heard me say that Mr Irwine was much of a preacher . . . Mrs Poyser used to say . . . Mr Irwine was like a good meal of victuals: you were the better for him without thinking on it' (*Adam Bede*)



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rolls him with many more than the average number of bangs and bumps, prepared, in the access of every important French *gare*, to startle the drowsy or distrait passenger into a sense of his situation.<sup>1</sup>

He probably also remembers that at this halting-place in mid-journey there is a well-served buffet, at which he has the privilege of '*dix minutes d'arrêt*'.

<sup>1</sup> Cp *Praeterita* '. . . About the moment in the afternoon when the modern fashionable traveller, intent on Paris, Nice and Monaco, and started by the morning mail from Charing Cross, has a little recovered himself from the qualms of his crossing and the irritation of fighting for seats at Boulogne, and begins to look at his watch to see how near he is to the buffet of Amiens, he is apt to be baulked and worried by the train's useless stop at one inconsiderable station, lettered ABBEVILLE. As the carriage gets in motion again, he may see, if he cares to lift his eyes for an instant from his newspaper, two square towers . . . dominant over the poplars and osiers of the marshy levels he is traversing. Such a glimpse is probably all he will ever wish to get of them; and I scarcely know how far I can make even the most sympathetic reader understand their power over my own life. . . There have been in sum, three centres of my life's thought: Rouen, Geneva and Pisa . . . Abbeville is . . . the preface and interpretation of Rouen . . . My most intense happinesses have, of course, been among mountains. But for cheerful, unalloyed, unwearying pleasure, the getting in sight of Abbeville on a fine summer afternoon, jumping out in the courtyard of the Hotel de l'Europe, and rushing down the street to see St Wulfran again before the sun was off the towers, are things to cherish the past for—to the end.

'Of Rouen and its cathedral, my saying remains yet to be said, if days be given me, in *Our Fathers have Told Us*.'

If, in the course of this study, I have quoted so many passages of Ruskin from books other than *The Bible of Amiens*, the reason is this. To read one book of an author is but to make his acquaintance. Now, one conversation with a person may reveal in him a number of singular traits. But it is only their repetition in particular circumstances that will ensure one's recognition of them as characteristic and essential features of his personality. . . In the case of a writer as of a musician or a painter, a succession of works takes the place of those varying circumstances which permit the reader, as it were, to experiment and comprehend. We find in a second book, in another canvas, those peculiarities which, when first we met them, we might have been tempted to attribute as much to the subject treated as to the man.

He is not, however, always so distinctly conscious that these ten minutes of arrest are granted to him within not so many minutes' walk of the central square of a city which was once the Venice of France.

Putting the lagoon islands out of question, the French River-Queen was nearly as large in compass as Venice herself; and divided, not by slow currents of ebbing and

From comparing a number of different works, we are able to isolate those features, common to all of them, which, in their totality, compose the artist's moral physiognomy. By adding a note to the passages I have quoted from *The Bible of Amiens*, wherever the text has, by analogy, even when such is remote and indirect, aroused the memory of other books by Ruskin, and by inserting in those notes the passage of which I have been reminded, I have tried to make it possible for the reader to put himself in the situation of someone who is not, indeed, making Ruskin's acquaintance for the first time, but who, having already had some contact with him, can, from an examination of his actual words, recognise what is permanent and fundamental in his attitude. In this way I have tried to equip the reader with, as it were, an improvised memory, furnishing it from Ruskin's other works—a kind of whispering-gallery in which the words taken from *The Bible of Amiens* may establish themselves in his mind by dint of calling forth related echoes. But these echoes of what is written in *The Bible of Amiens*, will not, as when memories spring unprompted to the mind, tell of those horizons, some near, some far, of which, since they are habitually hidden from us, our life, as it is lived day by day, is the measure of the intervening distance. Between them and what we find written here, what, precisely, has called them forth, will be none of that element of gentle resistance, as of a layer of atmosphere interposed, which is co-terminous with our existence and comprises the whole of the poetry of memory.

Fundamentally, some such attempt to help the reader to feel the impact of an artist's unique characteristics, to put before him those traits whose similarity with what he is reading at the moment may enable him to realise the essential part they play in the genius of a particular writer, should be the first part of every critic's task. If he has felt these things, and has helped others to feel them, he has come near to fulfilling his function. And if he has not, then he may write as many books as he will about *Ruskin: The Man, The Prophet, The Artist*, about the *Extent of his Influence and the Errors of His Teaching*, yet, no matter how majestically he may raise these vast constructions, he will merely have skirted his subject. They may win for him a great reputation, but as aids to the understanding of his author's



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returning tide, but by eleven beautiful trout streams, of which some four or five are as large, each separately, as our Surrey Wandle, or as Izaak Walton's Dove, and which, branching out of one strong current above the city, and uniting again after they have eddied through its streets, are bordered, as they flow down . . . to the sands of St Valéry, by groves of aspen and glades of poplar, whose grace and gladness seem to spring in every stately avenue instinct with the image of the just man's life—*Erit tanquam ignum quod plantatum est secus decursus aquarum.*<sup>1</sup>

But the Venice of Picardy owed her name, not to the beauty of her streams merely, but to their burden. She was a worker, like the Adriatic princess, in gold and glass, in stone, wood and ivory; she was skilled like an Egyptian in the weaving of fine linen; dainty as the maids of Judah in divers colours of needlework. And of these, the fruits of her hands, praising her in her own gates, she sent also

work, the subtle appreciation of its shades, they will be valueless.

In my view, however, the critic should go further still. He should try to reconstruct the peculiar life of the spirit which belongs to every writer who is obsessed by his own special view of reality, whose inspiration can be measured by the degree to which he has attained to the vision of that reality, whose talent can be estimated by the extent to which he can re-create it in his work, whose morality can be interpreted as the instinct which, by compelling him to see life under the aspect of Eternity (no matter how peculiar to himself that life may seem, to us, to be), forces him to sacrifice to the urgency of visualising it, and the necessity of reproducing it, and, thereby, assuring a vision of it that shall be durable and lucid, every duty, and even existence itself, because existence for him has no justification save as being the sole possible medium through which he can make contact with reality, no value other than that which an essential instrument may have for a doctor engaged on an experiment. I need hardly say that I have not attempted to carry through this second part of the critic's function in this brief essay, which will have achieved all that my ambition hoped, if it can arouse a desire to read Ruskin, and to revisit a certain number of cathedrals.

<sup>1</sup> Already, thirty years earlier, Ruskin had spoken, in *Modern Painters* of the 'serene simplicity of grace of the poplars of Amiens'.

portions to stranger nations, and her fame went out into all lands . . .

. . . All-coloured velvets . . . sent to vie with the variegated carpet of the Turk, and glow upon the arabesque towers of Barbary. Was not this a phase of provincial Picard life which an intelligent English traveller might do well to inquire into? Why should this fountain of rainbows leap up suddenly here by Somme; and a little Frankish maid write herself the sister of Venice, and the servant of Carthage and of Tyre?

The intelligent English traveller has of course no time to waste on any of these questions. But if he has bought his ham-sandwich, and is ready for the '*En voiture, messieurs*', he may perhaps condescend for an instant to hear what a loungee about the place, neither wasteful of his time, nor sparing of it, can suggest as worth looking at, when his train glides out of the station . . .

But, for you who have come to visit the cathedral, enough has already been said about the railway station of Amiens. The moment has come to take you to Notre-Dame: but by which of the many routes?

. . . I have never been able to make up my mind which was really the best way of approaching the cathedral for the first time. If you have plenty of leisure, and the day is fine,<sup>1</sup> and you are not afraid of an hour's walk down the main street of the old town, and across the river, and quite out to the chalk hill out of which the cathedral is half-quarried, half-walled;—and walk to the top of that . . .

<sup>1</sup> In which case you may have the good luck—as I had—(even if you fail to find the line of approach indicated by Ruskin) to see the cathedral, which, from afar, seems to be constructed only of stones, suddenly transfigured, and—the sun striking through the interior, making visible and *dematerialising* its unstained windows—rear heavenwards, between its pillars of stone, gigantic and immaterial visions of greenish gold and flame. Alternatively, you might do well to seek, close to the city slaughter-house, the point of view from which the engraving of *Amiens, All Souls Day*, was taken.



so, you will understand the real height and relation of tower to town:—then, returning, find your way to the Mount Zion of it by any narrow cross-streets and chance bridges you can—the more winding and dirty the streets, the better; and whether you come first on west front or apse, you will think them worth all the trouble that you have had to reach them.

But if the day be dismal, as it may sometimes be, even in France, of late years,—or if you cannot, or will not, walk, which may also chance, for all our athletics and lawn tennis—or, if you must really go to Paris this afternoon, and only mean to see all you can in an hour or two—then, supposing that, notwithstanding these weaknesses, you are still a nice sort of person, for whom it is of some consequence which way you come at a pretty thing, or begin to look at it, I *think* the best way is to walk from the Hôtel de France or the Place de Périgord, up the Street of Three Pebbles, towards the railway-station—stopping a little as you go, so as to get into a cheerful temper, and buying some bonbons or tarts for the children in one of the charming patissiers' shops on the left. Just past them, ask for the theatre, and just past that you will find, also on the left, three open arches, through which you can turn, passing the Palais de Justice, and go straight up to the south transept, which has really something about it to please everybody . . . Everybody *must* like the taper and transparent fretwork of the flèche above, which seems to bend to the west wind—though it doesn't—at least, the bending is a long habit, gradually yielded into, with gaining grace and submissiveness, during the last three hundred years. And, coming quite up to the porch, everybody must like the pretty French Madonna<sup>1</sup> in the middle

<sup>1</sup> Cp *The Two Paths*. 'These statues (those of the west porch of Chartres) have been long and justly considered as representative of the highest skill of the twelfth or earliest part of the thirteenth century in France; and they indeed possess a dignity and delicate charm, which are for the most part wanting in later works. It is owing partly

of it, with her head a little aside, and her nimbus switched a little aside, too, like a becoming bonnet. A Madonna in

to real nobleness of feature, but chiefly to the grace, mingled with severity, of the falling lines of excessively *thin* drapery; as well as to a most studied finish in composition; every part of the ornamentation tenderly harmonising with all the rest. So far as their power over certain tones of religious mind is owing to a palpable degree of non-naturalism in them, I do not praise it—the exaggerated thinness of body and stiffness of attitude are faults; but they are noble faults, and give the statues a strange look of forming part of the very building itself and sustaining it—not like the Greek caryatid, without effort—nor like the Renaissance caryatid, by painful or impossible effort—but as if all that was silent, and stern, and withdrawn apart, and stiffened in chill of heart against the terror of earth, had passed into a shape of eternal marble; and thus the Ghost had given, to bear up the pillars of the church on earth, all the patient and expectant nature that it needed no more in heaven. This is the transcendental view of the meaning of those sculptures. I do not dwell upon it. What I do lean upon is their purely naturalistic and vital power. They are all portraits—unknown, most of them, I believe—but palpably and unmistakably portraits, if not taken from the actual person for whom the statue stands, at all events studied from some living person whose features might fairly represent those of the king or saint intended. Several of them I suppose to be authentic; there is one of a queen, who has evidently, while she lived, been notable for her bright black eyes. The sculptor has cut the iris deep into the stone, and her dark eyes are still suggested with her smile.

‘There is another thing. I wish you specially to notice in these statues—the way in which the floral moulding is associated with the vertical lines of the figure. You have thus the utmost complexity and richness of curvature set side by side with the pure and delicate parallel lines, and both the characters gain in interest and beauty; but there is deeper significance in the thing than that of mere effect in composition; significance not intended on the part of the sculptor, but all the more valuable because unintentional. I mean the close association of the beauty of lower natures in animals and flowers, with the beauty of higher nature in human form. You never get this in Greek work. Greek statues are always isolated; blank fields of stone, or depths of shadow, relieving the form of the statue, as the world of lower nature which they despised retired in darkness from their hearts. Here, the clothed figure seems the type of the Christian spirit—in many respects feebler and more contracted—but purer; clothed in its white robes and crown, and with the riches of all creation at its side.



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decadence she is, for all, or rather by reason of all, her

'The next step in the change will be set before you in a moment, merely by comparing the statue from the west front of Chartres with that of the Madonna from the south transept door of Amiens.

'This Madonna, with the sculpture round her, represents the culminating power of Gothic art in the thirteenth century. Sculpture has been gaining continually in the interval; gaining simply because becoming every day more truthful, more tender, and more suggestive. By the way, the old Douglas motto, 'Tender and True', may wisely be taken up again by all of us, for our own, in art no less than in other things. Depend upon it, the first universal characteristic of all great art is Tenderness, as the second is Truth. I find this more and more every day: an infinitude of tenderness is the chief gift and inheritance of all the truly great men. It is sure to involve a relative intensity of disdain towards base things, and an appearance of sternness and arrogance in the eyes of all hard, stupid and vulgar people—quite terrific to such, if they are capable of terror, and hateful to them if they are capable of nothing higher than hatred. Dante's is the great type of this class of mind. I say the *first* inheritance is Tenderness, the *second* Truth, because the Tenderness is in the make of the creature, the Truth in his acquired habits and knowledge: besides, the love comes first in dignity as well as in time, and that is always pure and complete: the truth, at best, imperfect.

'To come back to our statue. You will observe that the arrangement of this sculpture is exactly the same as at Chartres—severe falling drapery, set off by rich floral ornament at the side; but the statue is now completely animated; it is no longer fixed as an upright pillar, but bends aside out of its niche, and the floral ornament, instead of being a conventional wreath, is of exquisitely arranged hawthorn. The work, however, as a whole, though perfectly characteristic of the advance of the age in style and purpose, is in some subtler qualities inferior to that of Chartres. The individual sculptor, though trained in a more advanced school, has been himself a man of inferior order of mind compared to the one who worked at Chartres. But I have not time to point out to you the subtler characters by which I know this.

'This statue, then, marks the culminating point of Gothic art, because up to this time, the eyes of its designers had been steadily fixed on natural truth—they had been advancing from flower to flower, from form to form, from face to face—gaining perpetually in knowledge and veracity—therefore perpetually in power and in grace. But at this point a fatal change came over their aim. From the statue they now began to turn their attention chiefly to the niche of the statue, and from the floral ornaments to the mouldings that enclosed the floral ornament.' (*The Two Paths*; sections 34-39)

prettiness and gay soubrette's smile; and she has no business there, neither, for this is St Honoré's porch, not hers; and grim grey St Honoré used to stand there to receive you,—he is banished now to the north porch, where nobody ever goes in. This was done long ago in the fourteenth century days, when people first began to find Christianity too serious, and devised a merrier faith for France, and would have bright-glancing, soubrette Madonnas everywhere—letting their own dark-eyed Joan of Arc be burnt for a witch. And thenceforward things went their merry way, straight on, 'ça allait, ça ira', to the merriest days of the guillotine.

But they could still carve in the fourteenth century, and the Madonna and her hawthorn-blossom lintel are worth your looking at,<sup>1</sup>—much more the field above, of sculpture as delicate and more calm,<sup>2</sup> which tells St Honore's own story, little talked of now in his Parisian faubourg. But you must be impatient to enter the cathedral. Drop first a penny in the box of each of the beggars who have their pitch there. It is not your business to enquire whether they have or have not a right to be there, or whether they deserve a penny.<sup>3</sup> Seek only to know whether you deserve

<sup>1</sup> Less charming than those of Bourges. Bourges is the cathedral of hawthorns (cp *Stones of Venice*: 'The architect of Bourges cathedral liked hawthorns; so he has covered his porch with hawthorn—it is a perfect Niobe of May. Never was such hawthorn; you would try to gather it forthwith, but for fear of being pricked.')

<sup>2</sup> 'Let me at once point out to you that their calmness is the attribute of the entirely highest class of art.' (*Astra Pentelici*, VII, *The Relation between Michael Angelo and Tintoretto*.)

<sup>3</sup> 'But in the outset let me give my readers one piece of practical advice. If you can afford it, pay your *custode* or sacristan well . . . and he will give you some true zeal and kindly feelings in return for a franc and a pleasant look. . . I know fifty people who will write me letters full of tender sentiment, for one who will give me tenpence; and I shall be very much obliged to you if you will give me tenpence for each of these letters of mine, though I have done more work than you will ever know of, to make them good tenpennyworth to you . . .' (*Stones of Venice*)



to have them to give, and give them heartily and not as though they burned your fingers.

It was this second route, the simplest, and, I imagine, the one you will prefer, that I took when I visited Amiens for the first time; and, when the south porch broke upon my view, I saw before me, to my left, just where Ruskin said I should, the beggars of whom he speaks, so aged-looking that they may well have been the same. Happy that I could so soon begin to follow his directions, I hastened, before doing anything else, to give them alms, filled with the illusion—in which was something of that fetishism which, so recently, I condemned—that I was performing a high act of piety to Ruskin's memory. I half believed that he who inspired my gesture was the associate of my charity, the part-giver of my alms. I experienced the same state of mind—though at a much smaller cost—as Frédéric Moreau, in *Education Sentimentale*, when, on the boat, in the presence of Madame Arnoux, he stretches out his closed hand to the harpist, and, 'opening it shamefacedly', lets drop into the man's cap a golden louis. 'It was not', says Flaubert, 'a sense of vanity that urged him to this generous act, which had been contrived for her to see, but rather the feeling that he was conferring a blessing. And with this went a movement of the heart which had about it something that was almost religious.'

Then, being too close to the porch to see it as a whole, I retraced my steps; and only when I had reached what appeared to me to be the right distance, did I turn to look at it. It was a glorious day, and I had come at precisely the moment when, at that time of year, the sun pays his daily visit to the Virgin who, once gilded, draws now her only gold from him during the few minutes when—at such times as he shows—he gives back a fleeting glory that is than gold far softer, and quite different. Nor is a single saint there left untouched. About the shoulders of one he drapes a mantle of heat, on the head of another sets an aureole of light. Never does he end his daily journey without making the circuit of the huge cathedral. Just

now it was the hour at which he visited the Virgin, and it was to his passing caress that her smile of all the ages seemed to be addressed; that smile which, as you have seen, Ruskin likens to the smile of a soubrette whom he rates lower than those more solemn and less sophisticated queens who adorn the Royal Porch at Chartres. If I have quoted the passage in which Ruskin explains this preference, it is because *The Two Paths* belongs to 1850, and the *Bible of Amiens* to 1885, and that a comparison of the texts shows the extent to which the latter differs from the kind of book so many of us write about matters that we have studied in order to be able to speak of them (assuming that we take that trouble), instead of speaking of matters which we have studied over many years, seeking to satisfy a disinterested taste, and never dreaming that one day they will make the subject of a book. It occurred to me that you might better like *The Bible of Amiens*, if you felt, glancing thus through its pages, that you were gaining knowledge of those things on which Ruskin had for so long brooded, those things, therefore, that expressed his deepest thought; and that the gift he was making to you was among those that we who love find most precious, since they consist of such objects as a man has long considered for his own delight, never intending some day to offer them to others. In composing his book, Ruskin was under no compulsion to write for you, but had only to make public his memories, and set his heart on the page for you to read. I thought that the Gilded Virgin might assume importance in your eyes if you realised that, nearly thirty years before *The Bible of Amiens*, she already had a place in Ruskin's memory, where, when he needed an example to place before his listeners, he could find her ready to his hand, full of grace, and loaded with those solemn thoughts with which so often he made tryst before her. She counted then, already, among those manifestations of beauty which not only gave to his physical sight a pleasure greater than any he had ever known, but which Nature, by giving him this sensitiveness to art, had predestined him to seek as being, in his own moving words, the greatest proof that could be on this earth of the True and the



Divine. I have no doubt that if, as has been said, the power of ordered thought left Ruskin in extreme old age—as the mysterious bird in a famous picture by Gustave Moreau waits not the coming of death to take flight from the house—among the familiar forms that flickered through the confused dreaming of an aged man, without his mind being able to catch them in their passage, the Gilded Virgin did, most probably, have place. Once more a mother, as the sculptor of Amiens had shown her, holding in her arms the Divine Child, she must have seemed like the nurse who leaves to lie alone upon his pillow him she so long has tended. And, just as in the feel of familiar furnishings, and in the taste of familiar food old men are wont to find, almost without knowing it, the last pleasures of their lives, made sensible, if in nothing else, by reason, at least, of the pain, often terrible, caused by their absence, I would have you believe that Ruskin felt an obscure delight in seeing a cast of that Gilded Virgin, now descended, through the invincible operations of Time, from the summit of his thoughts and the predilection of his taste, into the depths of his unconscious life, and into the world where habit finds its satisfactions.

Standing there with the smile that belongs to her alone, and makes of her not only a person, but of her statue an individual work of art, she seems to reduce the porch over which she leans to a mere museum whither we must go to see her, as strangers are compelled to make a visit to the Louvre if they would see Joconda. But if the cathedrals are, as has been said, the museums of the religious art of the Middle Ages, they are living museums in which Monsieur André Hallays could find nothing to reproach. They were not built as the repositories of works of art: rather, were the works of art—no matter how individual—made for them, and cannot, without sacrilege (I speak here only of artistic sacrilege) be placed elsewhere. I dearly love this Gilded Virgin with her private smile, the smile of the mistress of some celestial mansion; I dearly love her welcome at this door of the cathedral, in her exquisite and simple frame of hawthorn. Like the rose trees, the lilies and the figs wrought on another of the porches, these hawthorn boughs



are still in bloom. But this medieval springtide, so far prolonged, will not last for ever, and the winds of the centuries have already scattered on the ground before the church, as for some solemn Feast of scentless praise, a few carved petals of the roses. Doubtless, some day too, the Gilded Virgin's smile (which already has outlived our faith) will cease, through the crumbling of the stone which at present it defies so gracefully, to proffer to our children, beauty, as to our fathers' living faith it gave the gift of courage. I feel that I was wrong to call it a work of art. A statue which for evermore forms part of one particular spot of earth, of one particular city, of something, in other words, that can be named as a person is named, that is, an individual whose like can never be found elsewhere on the face of all the continents, of which the very porters, crying its name in the place whither we must of necessity come to find it, seem, all unconsciously to say to us, 'Love what you will never find a second time'—such a statue is, perhaps, something less universal than a work of art. She holds us, in any case, in bonds that are stronger than those of any mere work of art, bonds no less strong, indeed, than those with which persons and countries can constrain us. Joconda is Vinci's Joconda. What does it matter (I intend no discourtesy to Monsieur Hallays) where she was born?—what does it matter, if it comes to that, if she is French only by naturalisation? She is like some lovely thing that has no country. Nowhere, so long as thought-shadowed eyes are raised to look on her, can she ever be a rootless stranger. But this we cannot say of her smiling, sculptured sister (though in other ways, I need hardly point out, so much inferior), the Gilded Virgin. The child, I doubt not, of some Amiens quarry, having, in youth, made but one journey thence to the porch of St Honoré, from which, since, she has never moved; little by little weathered in the damp winds of our northern Venice which have twisted the spire above her head, gazing down through so many centuries on the dwellers in this city of which she is the oldest and most sedentary citizen, she is a true daughter of Amiens.<sup>1</sup> She is

<sup>1</sup> Not only gazing, but gazed at. I can at this very moment see

no work of art, but a lovely friend whom we must leave in her melancholy provincial home whence no one has succeeded in removing her, where, for other eyes than ours, she will, for long ages, feel on her face the wind and sun of Amiens, letting the little sparrows perch, with a sure decorative instinct, in the hollow of her welcoming hand, or peck at the stone buds of the ancient hawthorn which, through the centuries, has made her gay with the adornments of youth. In my room I have a photograph of the Joconda. It has one quality, and one quality only—the beauty that belongs to a masterpiece. The photograph, close beside it, of the Gilded Virgin, breathes the melancholy of remembrance.

But, come: we must not wait until the sun, followed by its jostling court of rays, and of shadows that cluster round every piece of stone relief-work, has ceased to touch with silver the ancient greyness of the porch that seems at once to be both dulled and radiant. For too long now we have lost sight of Ruskin. We left him at the feet of that same Virgin before whom he has waited patiently, with indulgence in his heart, till we shall have rendered, after our own fashion, the homage that we feel.

(You) cannot enter it to better advantage than by this door. For all cathedrals of any mark have nearly the same effect when you enter by the west door; but I know no other which shows so much of its nobleness from the south interior transept; the opposite rose being of exquisite fineness in tracery, and lovely in lustre; and the shafts of the transept aisles forming wonderful groups with those of the choir and nave; also the apse shows its height better, as it opens to you when you advance from the transept into the mid-nave, than when it is seen at once from the west end of the nave; where it is just possible for an irreverent person rather to think the nave narrow than the apse high.

men hastening towards the Somme, now swollen bank high by the tide, raising their eyes towards the 'Star of the Sea' as they pass the porch with which for so long they have been familiar.



And if you have no wonder in you for that choir and its encompassing circlet of light, when you look up into it from the cross-centre, you need not travel farther in search of cathedrals, for the waiting-room of any station is a better place for you;—but if it amaze you and delight you at first, then the more you know of it, the more it will amaze. For it is not possible for imagination and mathematics together, to do anything nobler or stronger than that procession of window, with material of glass and stone—nor anything that shall look loftier, with so temperate and prudent measure of actual loftiness . . .

Whatever you wish to see, or are forced to leave unseen, at Amiens, if the overwhelming responsibilities of your existence, and the inevitable necessities of precipitate locomotion in their fulfilment, have left you so much as one quarter of an hour, not out of breath,—for the contemplation of the capital of Picardy, give it wholly to the cathedral choir. Aisles and porches, lancet-windows and roses, you can see elsewhere as well as here—but such carpenters' work you cannot. It is late,—fully developed flamboyant, just past the fifteenth century,—and has some Flemish stolidity mixed with the playing French fire of it; but wood-carving was the Picard's joy from his youth up, and, so far as I know, there is nothing else so beautiful cut out of the goodly trees of the world.

Sweet and young-grained wood it is: oak *trained* and chosen for such work, sound now as four hundred years since. Under the carver's hand it seems to cut like clay, to fold like silk, to grow like living branches, to leap like living flame. Canopy crowning canopy, pinnacle piercing pinnacle—it shoots and wreaths itself into an enchanted glade, inextricable, imperishable, fuller of leafage than any forest, and fuller of story than any book.<sup>1</sup>

Famous now throughout the world, represented in numerous

<sup>1</sup> Begun on the 3rd July, 1508, the 120 stalls were completed in 1522, on St John's day. The beadle will let you walk at will through



museums by casts which the curators will not let you touch, these stalls, so old, so illustrious, so lovely, still fulfil their function as stalls—and have done so for many centuries, to the great satisfaction of the people of Amiens—much in the way that some artists, even after they have attained to fame and fortune, will continue their modest calling of teacher. This function consists not only in giving instruction to the mind, but in affording physical support to the body, and in this—turned up during every Office, and showing then only the underside of their surface—they modestly concur.

The wood, constantly polished by use, has gradually assumed, or, rather, has permitted to emerge, that dark, purplish colour which is its heart, and which those who have once felt its charm love so well that they cannot look at the colours of painted pictures, finding them, by comparison, crude. Savouring the crescent ardour, which grows from pitch to pitch, of this wood, an ardour that is as the very sap that has overflowed with the years from the tree, one is conscious of a kind of intoxication. The primitive simplicity of the carved figures takes from the substance in which they have been shaped a quality that makes them seem more than life-sized. And when to 'these fruits, these flowers, these leaves and these branches', these motifs drawn from the vegetation of the local countryside, which the sculptor of Amiens cut in timber from the neighbouring woods, is added difference of plane, and, consequently, the variation of polish to which they have been exposed, one can see those admirable contrasts of tone, so that the leaf shows

the lives of all these figures, who, in their colour, in the pattern of their gestures, in the worn surface of their robes and the stockiness of their bodies, still display the essential character of the wood, exhibit its strength and sing its softness. You will see, on a pilaster, Joseph travelling, and, on a pinnacle, Pharaoh sleeping, with all the figures of his dream about him, while on the misericords beneath, the diviners are busy at their task of interpretation. He will let you handle, without risk of damage, the long ropes of wood, and you will hear them give forth a sound like that of some instrument of music, which seems to announce, and does, in very fact, display, their tough and indestructible nature.

as a different colour from the stalk, and one is reminded of those noble accents which Monsier Gallé knows so well how to draw from the harmony of the oak-tree's heart.

But it is time that we came to what Ruskin calls the true Bible of Amiens, the west porch. The word 'Bible' is here used in its true, not its figurative, meaning. The porch at Amiens is not only in the vague sense which Victor Hugo might have given to it, a book in stone, a Bible in stone<sup>1</sup>—it is *the* Bible in stone. I do not doubt that before you grow familiar with it, when, for the first time, you see the western façade of Amiens, blue in the mist, dazzling in the morning light, drenched by the sun, and heavily gilded by the radiance of the afternoon, pink, and already touched by the tender evening glow at sundown—at any of these times, when the bells sound in the high heavens, times that Claude Monet has fixed in his sublime canvases, where he has displayed the life of that *thing* that men have made, but which Nature has resumed and made part of herself—a cathedral, whose existence, like that of the earth in her double revolution, has unwound through the long tale of the centuries—I do not doubt that then, isolating it from the changing colours with which by Nature it is endowed, you will feel at sight of this façade, a confused but powerful impression. Seeing raised heavenward this fretted, this monumental swarm of figures, life-sized and stone-wrought, each bearing in his hand a cross, a phylactery or a sceptre, this world of saints, these generations of the prophets, this race of kings, this procession of sinners, this assembly of judges, this flight of angels, one beside another, one above another, upright in the porch, staring down upon the city from niche and gallery, and higher still, where, in a jangle of bells, they seem to watchers at the foot of the towers, no more than a dazzle and a vagueness of the sight—then, doubtless, in the warmth of your emotion, you will feel how great a thing is this vast, upward surge, so motionless, yet so

<sup>1</sup> Miss Marie Nordlinger, the well-known English artist, has drawn my attention to one of Ruskin's letters, in which Victor Hugo's *Notre Dame de Paris* is described as the 'scum' of French literature.



eloquent of passion. But a cathedral is not only a thing of beauty to be felt. It may, for you, no longer be a source of teaching to be followed, but at least it is a book to be read and understood. The porch of a Gothic cathedral, and of Amiens in particular, is the Bible. Before explaining it to you, I would, by means of a quotation from Ruskin, make you realise that whatever your beliefs, the Bible is something real and actual, that we should set ourselves to find in it something other than the savour of the past, or the mere satisfaction of our curiosity.

. . . The 1st, 8th, 12th, 14th, 15th, 19th, 23rd and 24th Psalms, well-learned and believed, are enough for all personal guidance; the 48th, 72nd and 75th, have in them the law and the prophecy of all righteous government; and every real triumph of natural science is anticipated in the 104th. . . What other group of historic and didactic literature has a range comparable with it? . . . Think, if you can match (the scope of its contents) in any other—I do not say ‘book’, but ‘literature’. Think, so far as it is possible for any of us—either adversary or defender of the faith—to extricate his intelligence from the habit and the association of moral sentiment based upon the Bible, what literature could have taken its place, or fulfilled its function, though every library in the world had remained unravaged, and every teacher’s truest words had been written down?

I am no despiser of profane literature. So far from it that I believe no interpretations of Greek religion have ever been so affectionate, none of Roman religion so reverent, as those that will be found at the base of my art-teaching, and current through the entire body of my works. But it was from the Bible that I learned the symbols of Homer, and the faith of Horace: the duty enforced upon me in early youth of reading every word of the Gospels and prophecies as if written by the hand of God, gave me the habit of awed attention which afterwards



made many passages of the profane writers, frivolous to an irreligious reader, deeply grave to me. How far my mind has been paralysed by the faults and sorrows of life,<sup>1</sup>—how far short its knowledge may be of what I might have known, had I more faithfully walked in the light I had, is beyond my conjecture or confession: but as I never wrote for my own pleasure or self-proclaiming, I have been guarded as men who so write always will be, from errors dangerous to others;<sup>2</sup> and the fragmentary expressions of feeling or statements of doctrine, which from time to time I have been able to give, will be found now

<sup>1</sup> Cp *Praeterita* LXII. 'I wonder mightily now what sort of a creature I should have turned out, if at this time Love had been with me instead of against me; and instead of the distracting and useless pain, I had had the joy of approved love, and the untellable, incalculable motive of its sympathy and praise.' Always the same idea that grief, doubtless because it is a form of egotism, is an obstacle to the full exercise of our faculties. So, too 'All adversities, whether they reside in *temptation* or in *sorrow*',—and, in the Preface to *The Arrows of the Chase*: 'I have already done for my country as much service as she has will to receive . . . in words not one of which has been warped by interest, nor weakened by fear.' In the text which is our immediate concern, *grief* is equated with *sin*, and *self-interest* with *sorrow*. 'No one', says Emerson, 'is so frivolous as the dying.' From another point of view, that of Ruskin's sensibility, the quotation from *Praeterita*: 'What sort of a creature should I have turned out if, at this time, Love had been with me instead of against me', should be compared with the following letter from Ruskin to Rossetti. 'If you hear people say that I am utterly hard and cold, depend upon it it is untrue. Though I have no friendships and no loves, I cannot read the epitaph of the Spartans at Thermopylae with a steady voice to the end; and there is an old glove in one of my drawers that has lain there these eighteen years, which is worth something to me yet. If, on the other hand, you ever feel disposed to think me particularly good, you will be just as wrong as most people are on the other side. My pleasures are in seeing, thinking, reading, and making people happy (if I can, consistently with my own comfort).'

<sup>2</sup> Cp *The Queen of the air*: '. . . Because I have much loved; and not selfishly;—therefore the morning light is yet visible to me on those hills, and you who read may trust my thought and word in such work as I have to do for you; and you will be glad afterwards that you have trusted them . . .'

## A MASSACRE OF CHURCHES

by an attentive reader to bind themselves together into a general system of interpretation of sacred literature—both Classic and Christian.

That there *is* a sacred classic literature, running parallel with that of the Hebrews, coalescing in the symbolic legends of medieval Christendom, is shown in the most tender and impressive way by the independant, yet similar, influence of Virgil upon Dante and upon Bishop Gavaine Douglas.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the story of the Nemean lion, with the aid of Athena in its conquest, is the real root-stock of the legend of St Jerome's companion, conquered by the healing gentleness of the Spirit of Life.

I call it a legend only. Whether Heracles ever slew,

<sup>1</sup> 'You may, perhaps, for the moment, be surprised . . . to hear Horace spoken of as a pious person . . . Wise men know that he is also wise. True men know that he is also true. But pious men, for want of attention, do not always know that he is pious. One great obstacle to your understanding of him is your having been forced to construct Latin verses, with introduction of the word 'Jupiter' always, at need, when you were at loss for a dactyl. You always feel as if Horace only used it also when he wanted a dactyl . . . Note then his piety, and accept his assured speech of it: '*Dis pietas mea, et Musa cordi est*'. (*Val d'Arno*). See too: 'Horace is just as true and simple in his religion as Wordsworth; but all power of understanding any of the honest classic poets has been taken away from most English gentlemen by the mechanical drill in verse-writing at school. Throughout the whole of their lives afterwards, they never can get themselves quit of the notion that all verses were written as an exercise, and that Minerva was only a convenient word for the last of an hexameter, and Jupiter for the last but one. . .

' . . . It is impossible that any notion can be more fallacious . . . (Horace) dedicates his favourite pine to Diana, and he chants his autumnal hymn to Faunus guarding his fields, and he guides the noble youths and maids of Rome in their choir to Apollo, and he tells the farmer's little girl that the Gods will love her, though she has only a handful of salt and meal to give them—just as earnestly as any English gentleman taught Christian faith to English youth, in England's truest days.' (*The Queen of the Air*) . . . And, finally: 'The faith of Horace in the Spirit of the fountain of Bandusia, in the Faun of his hillside, and in the help of the greater gods, is constant, vital and practical. . .' (*Fors Clavigera*, Letter 2)



or St Jerome ever cherished, the wild or wounded creature, is of no moment to us. But the legend of St Jerome takes up the prophecy of the Millenium, and foretells, with the Cumaean Sybil, and with Isaiah, a day when the Fear of Man shall be laid in benediction, not enmity, on inferior beings—when they shall not hurt nor destroy in all the holy Mountain, and the Peace of the Earth shall be as far removed from the present sorrow, as the present gloriously animated universe from the nascent desert, whose deeps were the place of dragons, and its mountains, domes of fire.

Of that day knoweth no man; but the Kingdom of God is already come to those who have tamed in their own hearts what was rampant of the lower nature, and have learned to cherish what is lovely and human, in the wandering children of the clouds and fields.<sup>1</sup>

And now, perhaps, you will be pleased to follow the brief survey which, following Ruskin, it is my purpose to give of the Bible as it is written on the western porch of Amiens.

In the middle is the figure of Christ. He is, in no figurative, but in a very real, sense, the corner-stone of the building. On His left (that is to say, on our right, as we face the porch with its statue of Christ—in future, whenever I use the words left and right they must be understood as referring to Christ's left and right—) are six Apostles: next to Him St Peter, and then, in order, James the Greater, John, Matthew, Simon.<sup>2</sup> On His right are Paul, followed by James the Bishop, Philip and Bartholomew, Thomas and Jude. After the Apostles come the four great Prophets—with Simon, Isaiah and Jeremiah:

<sup>1</sup> Cp Bossuet, *Elévation sur les Mystères*: 'Let us then restrain the lively sallies of our vagabond thoughts: in this way we shall in some sort have command over the birds of the air, and, by bringing into subjection our impetuous angers, shall subjugate the lions. . . '

<sup>2</sup> This makes a total of only five, but I have precisely followed Proust's text. (*Translator*)



with Jude,<sup>1</sup> Ezekiel and Daniel. Between the windows, and filling the whole of the west front, are the twelve minor Prophets three between each, beginning on the extreme left: Hosiah, Jael, Amos, Micah, Jonah, Abdias, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi. Thus, quite literally, the cathedral rests upon Christ and upon the Prophets who foretold Him, and upon the Apostles who proclaimed Him: the Prophets of Christ, not of God the Father.

. . . The voice of the entire building is that of the Heaven at the Transfiguration—‘This is my beloved Son, hear ye Him’. Though Moses was an Apostle, of God—he is not here;—though Elijah was a Prophet, of God,—he is not here.

There is yet another and a greater prophet still, who, as it seems at first, is not here. Shall the people enter the gates of the temple, singing ‘Hosanna to the Son of David,’<sup>2</sup> and see no image of His father there?—Christ himself declare—‘I am the root and the offspring of David’; and yet the root have no sign near it of its earth?

Not so. David and his Son are together. David is the pedestal of the Christ.

Of the statue of Christ itself, I will not speak here at any length, as no sculpture would satisfy, or ought to

<sup>1</sup> Monsieur Huysmans says: ‘The Gospels are insistent that we should not confuse Jude with Judas, though the mistake has, in the past, been made. Because his name resembled that of the traitor, Jude was disowned by the Christians of the Middle Ages. . . He only once breaks silence, and that is to ask of Christ a question touching the subject of predestination. Jesus answers him elliptically, or, rather, does not answer him at all.’ In a later passage he speaks of the ‘deplorable notoriety which has come to him by reason of his name sounding like that of Judas’. (*La Cathédrale*)

<sup>2</sup> This apostrophe (in spite of certain seemingly simple analogies with Renan, such as ‘Isaiah told the conservatives of his day’,—‘A Jewish merchant (King Solomon) reported to have made one of the largest fortunes of his time’, (*Unto This Last*), shows very clearly how Ruskin’s genius differed from Renan’s. Of this same phrase, ‘the son

satisfy, the hope of any loving soul that has learned to trust in Him; but at the time it was beyond what then had been reached in sculptured tenderness and was known far and near as the *Beau Dieu d'Amiens*. Yet understood, observe, just as clearly to be no more than a symbol of the Heavenly Presence, as the poor coiling worms below were symbols of the demonic ones . . . No *idol* in our sense of the word—only a Letter or Sign of the Living Spirit—which, however, was indeed conceived by every worshipper as here meeting him at the temple gate: the Word of Life, the King of Glory, and the Lord of Hosts. *Dominus Virtutum*, 'Lord of Virtues', is the best single rendering

of David', Renan says: 'The family of David had long been extinct. Jesus, however, let himself be given a title without which he could have looked for no success, and it seems as though, finally, he himself took pleasure in it', etc. The opposition between the two writers is here concerned merely with a matter of names, but where longer passages are in question the difference between them becomes accentuated. We know with what an effect of magnificence in *The Crown of Wild Olives* (*The Eagle's Nest*), and more particularly in *The Lilies in the Queen's Gardens*, Ruskin quotes the words given by St Luke (IX, 58): 'And Jesus answereth them: The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not whereon to lay His head'. We know with what marvellous ingenuity Renan could comment on the Gospels, making use for his purpose both of history and geography (though necessarily somewhat hypothetical), and managed to impart to the ancient story so vivid a sense of living reality, setting the words in their historical circumstances and topographical framework with a power that no one can deny, though, for that very reason, to some extent restricting their sense and relevance. He believed—and it would be interesting to compare Ruskin's comment on the passage with his own—that this verse from St Luke proves that Jesus was already beginning to grow weary of his vagabond existence (*Vie de Jésus*, p. 324 of the first edition). There seems to be in such an interpretation, restrained though it is by an exquisite sense of proportion and a kind of awestruck modesty, the germ of that special form of irony which likes to give a prosaic and practical meaning to Sacred, or even to Classical, texts. I need hardly add that Renan's work is a great product of genius. But there are moments when one is within an ace of seeing it as the *Belle Hélène* of Christianity.

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of the idea conveyed to a well-taught disciple in the thirteenth century by the words of the twenty-fourth Psalm.

We cannot pause at each of the statues of the western porch. Ruskin will explain to you the meaning of the low reliefs placed further down (two four-leaved reliefs placed in pairs under each), those below each of the Apostles signifying—the upper one of each pair, the particular virtue which he taught or practised, the lower, its opposite vice. The reliefs under the Prophets image their prophecies.<sup>1</sup>

Beneath St Peter is Courage with a leopard on his shield. Beneath Courage is Cowardice, shown in the figure of a man frightened by an animal, and letting fall his sword, while a bird continues with its song. 'The coward has not the heart of a thrush.' Beneath St Andrew is Patience, holding a shield with a bull on it (never giving back). Beneath Patience is Anger:<sup>1</sup> a woman stabbing a man with a sword, (Anger being an essentially feminine vice which has nothing to do with indignation). Beneath St James is Gentillesse, with a lamb, and Churlishness, a woman kicking her leg over the head of her cup-bearer; 'the final forms of ultimate French churlishness being in the feminine gestures of the Cancan'.

Beneath St John is Love, the divine, not the human Love; 'I in them, and thou in Me'. Her shield bears a tree with many branches grafted into its cut-off stem. 'In those days shall Messiah be cut off, but not for Himself.' Beneath Love is Discord: a wife and her husband quarrelling. She has dropped her distaff. Beneath St Matthew, Obedience, with a camel. Actually, says Ruskin,

<sup>1</sup> Cp the description of the capitals in the Ducal Palace (*The Stones of Venice*, II, viii)



the most disobedient and ill-tempered of all serviceable beasts,—yet passing his life in the most painful service. I do not know how far his character was understood by the northern sculptor; but I believe he is taken as a type of burden-bearing, without joy or sympathy, such as the horse has, and without power of offence, such as the ox has.<sup>1</sup> His bite is bad enough, but presumably little known of at Amiens, even by Crusaders, who would always ride their own war-horses or nothing.

Beneath Obedience stands Rebellion,<sup>2</sup> a man snapping his fingers at his bishop (as Henry VIII at the Pope—and the modern French and English cockney at all priests whatever).

Beneath St Peter, Perseverance caresses a lion and holds a crown. 'Hold fast that which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.' Below, Atheism is shown leaving his shoes at the church door. 'The infidel fool is always represented in twelfth and thirteenth century MSS as barefoot—the Christian having "his feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of Peace."' Compare, 'How beautiful are thy feet with shoes, O Prince's daughter'.<sup>3</sup>

Beneath St Paul is Faith, with, below it, Idolatry, kneeling to a monster. Beneath St James the Bishop is Hope bearing a standard with a cross on it: below it, Despair, stabbing herself.

Beneath St Philip is Charity, giving a mantle to a naked beggar.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Volney, *Voyage en Syrie*

<sup>2</sup> Cp *Émile Mâle, l'Art Religieux au XIIIème Siècle*: 'Rebellion appears in the Middle Ages under one form only, disobedience to the Church. The rose-window in Notre-Dame de Paris (these diminutive scenes are almost identical at Paris, Chartres, Amiens and Rheims) shows one curious detail: the man in revolt against his bishop wears the Jew's conical cap. The Jew, who for so many centuries has refused to hearken to the words of the Church, seems to be the very symbol of revolt and obstinacy.'

<sup>3</sup> *Song of Songs*, vii, 1; the previous quotation is from Ephesians, vi, 15

<sup>4</sup> In *The Bible of Amiens*, Ruskin says 'No nonsense talked in those

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Beneath St Bartholomew is Chastity with the Phoenix, and, below, Lust displayed in the image of a young man embracing a woman who holds a sceptre and a mirror. Beneath St Thomas is Wisdom (bearing a shield with an edible root, meaning Temperance as the beginning of wisdom). Below is Folly, 'the ordinary type used in all early Psalters, of a glutton armed with a club'. 'The fool has said in his heart—there is no God: he devoureth my people like a morsel of bread' (Psalm liii).<sup>2</sup>

Beneath St Jude stands Humility, with a shield showing a Dove, with Pride falling from his horse.

Note farther [says Ruskin] that the Apostles are all tranquil, nearly all with books, some with crosses, but all with the same message: Peace be to this house. And if the Son of Peace be there, etc.

. . . But the Prophets—all seeking, or wistful, or tormented, or wondering, or praying, except only Daniel.

days of the evil consequences of indiscriminate charity. While the ideal Charity of Giotto at Padua presents her heart in her hand to God, and tramples at the same instant on bags of gold, the treasures of the world, and gives only corn and flowers; that on the west porch of Amiens is content to clothe a beggar with a piece of the staple manufacture of the town'. The same comparison occurred, clearly by accident, to Monsieur Émile Mâle: 'The Charity offering to God a flaming heart', he says, 'belongs to the country of St Francis of Assisi. Charity giving his mantle to the poor is the child of the country of St Vincent de Paul . . .' Cp, too, the different interpretations of Charity in *The Stones of Venice*.

<sup>2</sup> Cp this expression with the words of Achilles *δημοβόρος* about which Ruskin says: 'I have no words for the wonder with which I hear Kinghood still spoken of, even among thoughtful men, as if governed nations were a personal property, and might be bought and sold, or otherwise acquired, as sheep, of whose flesh their king was to feed, and whose fleece he was to gather; as if Achille's indignant epithet of base kings—"people-eating", were the constant and proper title of all monarchs, and enlargement of a king's dominion meant the same thing as the increase of a private man's estate.' (*Sesame and Lilies: Kings' Treasuries*)



The *most* tormented is Isaiah. . . No scene of his martyrdom below, but his seeing the Lord in his temple, and yet feeling he had unclean lips. Jeremiah also carries his cross,—but more serenely.

Unfortunately, we cannot wait to examine the reliefs beneath the Prophets, bearing verses explanatory of their principal prophecies: Ezekiel seated before two wheels, Daniel holding a book supported by two lions, and again, seated at Belshazzar's feast; the fig tree and the barren vine, the sun and the moon without light, as prophesied by Joel; Amos gathering fruit from the leafless vine to feed his sheep who can find no grass; Jonah escaping from the sea, and, later, seated beneath a calabash tree; Habakkuk, whom an angel holds by the hair, visiting Daniel who caresses a young lion; the prophecies of Zephaniah, the beasts of Nineveh; the Lord carrying a lantern in each hand; the hedgehog and the bittern, etc.

I have not the time to show you the two secondary doors of the west porch, that of the Virgin<sup>1</sup> (which contains, in addition to the statue of the Virgin, the following: to her left, the figures of the Angel Gabriel, of the Virgin of the Annunciation, of the Virgin Visiting, of Saint Elizabeth, of the Virgin presenting the child in the Temple, and of St Simeon; and to her right, the three Magi, Herod, Solomon and the Queen of Sheba (each statue having beneath it, like those of the main porch, low-reliefs referring to it)—and the porch of St Firmin with its array of local saints. No doubt because they are local,

<sup>1</sup> Ruskin, when he comes to describe this door, says: 'If you come at all, good Protestant feminine reader, come civilly: and be pleased to recollect, if you have, in known history, material for recollection, this (or, if you cannot recollect—be you very solemnly assured of this): that neither Madonna-worship, nor Lady-worship of any sort, whether of dead ladies or living ones, ever did any human creature harm—but that Money-worship, Wig-worship, Cocked-hat-and-feather-worship, Plate-worship, Pot-worship and Pipe-worship, have done, and are doing, a great deal,—and that any of these and all, are quite million-fold more offensive to the God of Heaven and Earth and the Stars, than all the absurdest and livingest mistakes made by any



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because they are the 'friends of the Amienois', the low-reliefs beneath them represent the signs of the Zodiac, and the labours associated with each month of the year, reliefs to which Ruskin gives his especial admiration. You will find in the Trocadero Museum casts of these reliefs of the St Firmin porch, and, in Monsieur Mâle's book, a charming series of comments on the local and climatic truth to nature of these tiny *genre* studies.<sup>1</sup>

But into questions respecting the art of these bas-reliefs. [Ruskin continues] I do not here attempt to enter. They were never intended to serve as more than signs and guides to thought. And if the reader follows this guidance quietly, he may create for himself better pictures in his heart; and at all events may recognise these following general truths, as their united message.

First, that throughout this Sermon on the Amiens Mount, generation of His simple children, about what the Virgin-mother could, or would, or might, do, or feel for them.'

<sup>1</sup> 'Here, indeed', Ruskin says, speaking of the almanacks, 'we have the "Works and Days" . . . ' After first demonstrating their Byzantine and Romanesque origins, he goes on: 'In these little pictures, these lovely French Georgics, we see man performing acts that have remained the same through the ages—timeless acts'. Then he proceeds to show how, in spite of their timelessness, they have a realistic and purely local character. 'In the Middle Ages, open country began at the foot of the city walls . . . with its gracious rhythm of Virgilian tasks. The two towers of Chartres rise above the harvest-fields of La Beauce, and the cathedral of Rheims dominates the vineyards of Champagne. At Paris, from the apse of Notre-Dame were visible the woods and open country, and the sculptors, intent upon imagined scenes of rural life, could draw inspiration from a near-by original.' And again, further on: 'All is simple, sober, never far from the realities of human life. There is nothing here that resembles those rather faded Graces whom we find on classical frescoes: no Cupid among the vines, no winged tutelary spirit in the stubble. The charming Florentine goddesses of Botticelli, dancing at the feast of Primavera have here no counterpart. What we are shown is man unaccompanied, at odds with Nature, and so full of vitality that the little scenes have retained, after the lapse of five centuries, all their power to move us.'

Christ never appears, or is for a moment thought of, as the Crucified, nor as the Dead: but as the Incarnate Word—as the present Friend—as the Prince of Peace on Earth,—and as the Everlasting King in Heaven. What His life *is*, what His commands *are*, and what His judgment *will* be, are the things here taught: not what He once did, nor what He once suffered, but what He is now doing—and what He requires us to do. That is the pure, joyful beautiful lesson of Christianity; and the fall from that faith, and all the corruption of its abortive practice, may be summed up briefly as the habitual contemplation of Christ's death instead of His life, and the substitution of His past suffering for our present duty.<sup>1</sup>

Then, secondly, though Christ bears not *His* cross, the mourning prophets—the persecuted apostles—and the martyred disciples *do* bear theirs . . . For just as it is well for you to remember what your undying Creator is *doing* for you—it is well for you to remember what your dying fellow-creatures *have done*: the Creator you may at your pleasure deny or defy—the Martyr you can only forget; deny you cannot. Every stone of this building is cemented

<sup>1</sup> On the subject of morbid, realistic art, see *Lectures on Art*: 'Try to conceive the quantity of time, and of excited and thrilling emotion, which have been wasted by the tender and delicate women of Christendom during these last six hundred years, in thus picturing to themselves, under the influence of such imagery, the bodily pain, long since passed, of One Person: which so far as they indeed conceived it to be sustained by a Divine Nature, could not for that reason have been less endurable than the agonies of any simple human death by torture: and then try to estimate what might have been the better result, for the righteousness and felicity of mankind, if these same women had been taught the deep meaning of the last words that were ever spoken by their Master to those who had ministered to Him of their substance: 'Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.' If they had but been taught to measure with their pitiful thoughts the tortures of battlefields—the slowly consuming plagues of death in the starving children, and wasted age, in the innumerable desolation that those battles left;—nay, our own life of peace, the agony of unnurtured,



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with his blood, and there is no furrow of its pillars that was not ploughed by his pain.

Keeping then, these things in your heart, look back now to the central statue of Christ, and hear His message with understanding. He holds the Book of the Eternal Law in His left hand: with His right He blesses—but blesses on condition. ‘This do and thou shalt live’, nay, in stricter and more piercing sense, this *be* and thou shalt live: to show Mercy is nothing—thy soul must be full of mercy; to be pure in act is nothing—thou shalt be pure in heart also.

And with this further word of the unabolished law—‘This if thou do *not*, this if thou art *not*, thou shalt die.’ . . . The Life and Gospel and Power of it, are all written in the mighty works of its true believers: in Normandy and Sicily, on river islets of France and in the river glens of England, on the rocks of Orvieto, and by the sands of Arno. But of all, the simplest, completest, and most authoritative in its lesson to the active mind of North Europe, is this on the foundation stones of Amiens . . . All human creatures in all ages and places of the world, who have had warm affections, common sense and self-command, have been and are, Naturally Moral. Human nature in its fullness is necessarily Moral—without Love it is inhuman, without sense, inhuman—without discipline,

untaught, unhelped creatures, awaking at the grave’s edge to know how they should have lived; and the worse pain of those whose existence, not the ceasing of it, is death; those to whom the cradle was a curse, and for whom the words they cannot hear, “ashes to ashes”, are all that they have ever received of benediction. These—you who would fain have wept at His feet, or stood by His cross—these you have always with you! Him you have not always.’

See, too, this comment on Saint Geneviève, in the *Bible of Amiens*: ‘There are thousands of religious girls who have never got themselves into any calendars, but have wasted and wearied away their lives—heaven knows why, for *we* cannot; but here is one, at any rate, who neither scolds herself to martyrdom, nor frets herself into consumption, but becomes a tower of the Flock, and builder of folds for them all her days.’



inhuman . . . All wise men know and have known these things, since the form of man was separated from the dust. The knowledge and enforcement of them have nothing to do with religion.<sup>1</sup>

But if, loving well the creatures that are like yourself, you feel that you would love still more dearly, creatures better than yourself—were they revealed to you;—if, striving with all your might to mend what is evil, near you and around you, you would fain look for a day when a Judge of all the earth shall wholly do right, and the little hills rejoice on every side; if, parting from the companions that have given you all the best joys you had on earth, you desire ever to meet their eyes again and clasp their hands,—where eyes shall no more be dim, nor hands fail; if, preparing yourselves to lie down beneath the grass in silence and loneliness, seeing no more beauty, and feeling no more gladness,—you would care for the promise to you

<sup>1</sup> The reader will, I think, find a certain similarity between the idea here expressed by Ruskin, (beginning with the words, 'All human creatures') and his theory of divine inspiration in Chapter 3. 'He is not gifted with higher ability, nor called into new offices, but enabled to use his granted natural powers, in their appointed place, to the best purpose.' And 'The form later taken by the monastic spirit was conditioned by something much more fundamental than any change in the ideal of virtue or of human happiness brought by Christianity.' Ruskin stresses this idea more than once, saying that the cult offered by a Pagan to Jupiter was not very different from its Christian counterpart, etc . . . In this same Chapter 3 of *The Bible of Amiens*, too, he compares the College of Augurs and the Institution of the Vestals, with the Christian monastic orders. But closely bound though we see this idea to be to those I have already mentioned, and, as it were, allied with them, it does contain something new. It comes, in Ruskin's mind, in direct line from his theory of faith in Horace, and from many similar developments. But, above all, it is closely connected with one idea very different from those to which I referred at the beginning of this note: with the idea that a certain aesthetic feeling has run through history, which was not interrupted by Christianity. And now that, proceeding link by link along the chain of reasoning, we have arrived at an idea so different from our point of departure (though it is not new to me), we ought to ask whether it is not, in

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of a time when you should see God's light again, and know the things you have longed to know, and walk in the peace of everlasting love—*then*, the hope of these things is to you religion, the Substance of them in your life is Faith. And in the power of them it is promised to us, that the kingdoms of this world shall yet become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ.

Here ends the teaching which the men of the thirteenth century sought to find in the cathedral, and which, with a display that is, at once, useless and bizarre, it still offers, as in some book written in a solemn language whose every character is a work of art, though no man understands it. Nevertheless, by giving to it a sense less strictly religious than would have been prevalent in the Middle Ages, a sense that I should, perhaps, more accurately describe as 'æsthetic', it has been made possible for you to link it with one of those sentiments which

fact, the idea that Greek art has been continuous, running, for example, from the *metopes* of the Parthenon to the mosaics of St Mark's and the labyrinth of Amiens (an idea which, in all probability, he thought true because he found it beautiful), so that Ruskin extended it, though it was primarily æsthetic, to cover religion and history, conceiving the College of Augurs to be in some sort a parallel development to, and assimilable with, the Benedictine rule, and the devotion of Hercules as equivalent to the devotion of St Jerome, etc, etc. But from the moment that he developed the idea that the Christian religion differed little from the religion of the Greeks ('more fundamental than any change in the ideal of virtue or of human happiness brought by Christianity'), he felt no need, from the logical point of view, to make a clear cut between religion and morality. There is, too, something else, something additional, in this new idea, though this new thing may not have been responsible for his development of it. This new element is one of those views especially characteristic of Ruskin, which are not, strictly speaking, philosophical at all, or attached to any system of thought, and which, to those who think along purely logical lines, might seem false, though they at once hold the attention of anyone who is sensitive to the individual colour of a thought, and enable him to guess, as a fisherman may guess at the depth of a stretch of water, at its profundity. I would quote as being among ideas of this kind, entertained by Ruskin—ideas that might well seem to be outmoded



strike through the fabric of our lives, and show to us as the only genuine reality, to one of those stars 'to which it is well that we should hitch our waggon'. Having previously understood but imperfectly the religious art of the Middle Ages, I, in my enthusiasm for Ruskin, said to myself: 'He will teach me; for is not he, too, in some degree, the Truth? He will enable my spirit to enter regions to which formerly it had no access, for he is the gate. He will purify me, for his inspiration is as the lily of the valley. He will intoxicate and give me life, for he is the wine of life.' And I did, indeed, feel that the mystic perfume of the Rose of Sharon had not altogether vanished, because from his words I still could breathe it in. Thus, the Stones of Amiens have taken on a dignity for me comparable to that of the Stones of Venice. They seem to contain, as it were, graven with beauty in their very substance, something of that grandeur which the Bible possessed when it was still the Truth in men's hearts. *The Bible of Amiens* was designed by Ruskin to be but the first book of a series to be called *Our Fathers Have Told Us*. If the old Prophets in the porch of Amiens were sacred for him, it was because they still expressed the soul that had lived in the men of the thirteenth century. Before ever I knew whether I should find it there, it was Ruskin's soul I sought, that soul which he carved as deeply into the stones of Amiens as did ever they who made the

to banal minds, incapable of understanding and feeling them as true—the one that led him to maintain that liberty is fatal to the artist, while obedience and respect are essential. And also the idea that memory is the most useful instrument available for the purposes of the artist. If we would make an attempt to trace the hidden train of thought that forms the connection between ideas so different from one another, and to find their common root in Ruskin's work, and knit, probably very loosely, if knit at all, in his mind, I need only point out that his statement: 'I am the only author to think as Herodotus thought', is a simple variant of 'Horace is pious in precisely the same way as Milton was pious'—an idea which is, itself, no more than a pendant to the aesthetic theory which I have analysed elsewhere—'This cupola is simply a Greek vase, this Salome a cup-bearer, this Cherubim a Harpy, etc.'



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sculptures, for the words of genius are no less effective than the chisel in giving an immortal form to things. Literature, too, is a 'lamp of sacrifice' which consumes itself that it may give light to those who come after. I have conformed unconsciously to the spirit of the title, *Our Fathers Have Told Us*, since it was my desire to read in the Bible of Ruskin that took me to Amiens. Because Ruskin believed in these men of an older day, because in them dwelt truth and beauty, he, too, wrote his Bible, as they, believing in the Prophets and Apostles, wrote theirs. To Ruskin, the statues of Jeremiah, of Ezekiel, of Amos did not appear, perhaps, in precisely the same light as to those who fashioned them, but at least he found in them a work full of instruction, carried out by men who were great artists and true believers. In them he saw the eternal meaning of prophecies, the exact bearing of which has now been forgotten. If, for us, the fact that they are the work of these men, and convey the sense of these prophecies, is not enough to make them precious, let us at least look on them as things in which Ruskin found that spirit which is the brother and the father of our own. Before ever we reached this cathedral of Amiens in our journeying, it was—was it not?—for us, above all, the building he had loved. Did we not feel that in it still were embalmed the Sacred writings, because in a spirit of piety we had sought Truth in his books? And now, though we may halt before the statues of Isaiah and of Jeremiah, of Ezekiel and of David, with the reflection: Here are the four major prophets, next the four minor; and of the major prophets, four complete the tale, yet is there still one who is not here, though we cannot say that he is altogether absent, for, in Amiens, wherever we may look, we see him. That one is Ruskin. If his statue does not stand in the porch of the cathedral, its place is at the entry to our hearts. The voice of that prophet is no longer heard—because he has said all that he had to say. It is for the generations of men to take his words and make of them a song.



## JOHN RUSKIN

Like *The Muses leaving their Father Apollo to carry Light into the World*,<sup>1</sup> Ruskin's ideas left, one by one, the divine brain which bore them, and, incarnate in living books, went forth to instruct the peoples. Ruskin retired into that solitude which, so often, is the last home of those whose lives have been rich in prophecy, there to remain until such time as, their superhuman labours ended, it may please God to call the hermit and ascetic to Himself. One can only guess, peering through the veil stretched by pious hands, at the mystery that was there accomplished, at the slow disintegration of the perishable brain which had been quick with an immortal posterity.

Today, death has made accessible to humanity at large the vast heritage which Ruskin bequeathed to it. For the man of genius can give birth to deathless works only if he create them in the image, not of his own mortal state, but of that exemplar of humanity which dwells within him. His thoughts are, in a sense, but lent him as companions of his earthly life. When he dies, they return into the world, to teach it. In just such a way, has the august house, known to all of us, in the Rue de la Rochefoucauld, where once Gustave Moreau lived, become, since his death, the Gustave Moreau Museum.

There has for many years been a John Ruskin Museum.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Title of a picture by Gustave Moreau, now in the Moreau Museum

<sup>2</sup> In Sheffield



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Its Catalogue reads like an epitome of all the Arts and all the Sciences. Photographs of pictures by the Masters stand cheek by jowl with mineral samples, as in Goethe's house. Ruskin's work, like his Museum, is universal. He sought the Truth, and found beauty even in chronological tables and social laws. But since the logicians have defined 'Fine Art' in a way that excludes mineralogy and political economy alike, it is only of that part of his work which is concerned exclusively with the 'Fine Arts', as generally understood, with Ruskin, that is, as an æsthetic philosopher and critic, that I intend to speak here.

The first thing said about him as a rule is that he was a realist: and it is true that he often declared that the artist ought to devote himself to the pure imitation of nature—'rejecting nothing, despising nothing, selecting nothing'.

But it has been said also that he was an intellectualist, because he wrote that the best pictures are those which contain the noblest thought. Speaking of the group of children shown in the foreground of Turner's *Building of Carthage*, amusing themselves by floating small boats, he concludes thus:

The exquisite choice of this incident, as expressive of the ruling passion which was to be the source of future greatness, in preference to the tumult of busy stone-masons or arming soldiers, is quite as appreciable when it is told as when it is seen,—it has nothing to do with the technicalities of painting: a scratch of the pen would have conveyed the idea and spoken to the intellect as much as the elaborate realisations of colour. Such a thought as this is far above all art; it is epic poetry of the highest order.

'Similarly' [adds Milsand<sup>1</sup>], who quotes this passage in his analysis of a Holy Family by Tintoretto, 'the feature in which

<sup>1</sup> Milsand is one of the foremost among those authors who have written on Ruskin, not only in time, but in power of thought. He was a kind of precursor, an inspired, though incomplete, prophet, who did not live long enough to do more than start the work which he had determined, on his own confession, to undertake.



Ruskin recognised the hand of a great master, was a ruined wall, and a building in course of construction, which the artist used as a means of showing symbolically that the birth of Christ marked the end of the Jewish dispensation and the coming of a new contract.' In another composition by the same Venetian, a *Crucifixion*, Ruskin saw a masterpiece of painting, because the artist was able, by introducing a seemingly insignificant incident in the background of the scene at Calvary, to state the profound idea that it was Jewish materialism, with its expectation of a purely temporal Messiah, and its consequent disappointment after the entry into Jerusalem, that was the cause of all the hatred let loose against the Saviour, and, therefore, of His death.

It has been said that by giving science too large a rôle to play in art, he suppressed the part which should have belonged by right to the imagination. Does he not say that: 'every class of rock, earth and cloud, must be known to the painter with geologic and meteorologic accuracy'? and:

Every geological formation has features entirely peculiar to itself, definite lines of fracture giving rise to fixed resultant forms of rock and earth; peculiar vegetable products, among which still further distinctions are wrought out by variations of climate and elevation . . . (The painter) observes every character of the plant's colour and form . . . he seizes on its lines of grace or energy . . . observes its local habits, its love or fear of peculiar places, its nourishment or destruction by particular influences; he associates it in his mind with all the features of the situation it inhabits . . . He must trace the fine fissure and the descending curve and the undulating shadow made by the encroaching soil, and render it all with a touch as light as the touch of rain-drops . . . A painting is admirable in proportion to the number and importance of the factual details with which it furnishes us about reality.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Stones of Venice*, and he returns to the subject in *Val d'Arno*, *The Bible of Amiens*, and elsewhere. He talks of rough stones as being



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But it has been said, as against all this, that he ruined science because of the over-large place that he gave to the imagination. Indeed it is impossible not to think of the naive teleology of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, who says that God divided melons into sections that man might eat them the more easily—when one reads passages like the following:

God has employed colour in His creation as the unvarying accompaniment of all that is purest, most innocent, and most precious; while for things precious only in material uses, or dangerous, common colours are reserved . . . look at a dove's neck, and compare it with the grey back of a viper . . . The crocodile and alligator are grey, but the innocent lizard green and beautiful.

It has been said that he reduced art to the position of a mere vessel for science, just as he carried his theory of the work of art, considered as a source of information about the nature of things, to the extent of declaring that 'a Turner has discovered more about the nature of rocks than all the learned Academies have ever done', and that, 'a Tintoretto, merely by giving free play to his hand, has revealed complex truths about the play of the muscles such as would baffle all the anatomists of the world'. It has been said, too, that he humiliated science in the interests of art.

It has been said, finally, that he was a pure æsthete, and that his only religion was the religion of Beauty, because, in fact, he loved it all his life.

On the other hand, it has been said that he was not even an artist because he introduced into his appreciation of beauty

in themselves works of art which the architect must not mutilate 'There is history in them . . . and in all their veins and bones and flame-like stainings, and broken and disconnected lines, they write various legends, never untrue, of the former political state of the mountain kingdom to which they belonged, of its infirmities and fortitudes, convulsions and consolidations, from the beginning of time.'



considerations which, though they may belong to a higher moral order, have nothing to do with æsthetics. In the first chapter of *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, he lays upon the architect the duty of using only the most precious and the most durable of materials, basing his argument on the sacrifice of Jesus, and on the permanent conditions of any sacrifice that shall be precious in God's eyes, conditions which we should conclude have not been in any way modified, since God has never given us any express assurance that they have been. And here is one of the arguments he uses in *Modern Painters* to settle once and for all the quarrel between the champions of colour and the preachers of chiaroscuro:

Take a wider view of nature, and compare generally rainbows, sunrises, roses, violets, butterflies, birds, goldfish, rubies, opals and corals with alligators, hippopotami, lions, wolves, bears, swine, sharks, slugs, bones, fungi, fogs, and corrupting, stinging, destroying things in general, and you will feel then how the question stands between the colourists and the chiaroscurists—which of them have nature and life on their side, and which have sin and death.

Because men have said so many contradictory things about Ruskin, it has been concluded that he was himself contradictory.

Of all the many aspects of Ruskin's physiognomy, the one most familiar to us, because it is the one of which we possess, so to speak, the most finished portrait, the most welcome, the most striking, and the most widely known, is that of the Ruskin who, all his life long, had but one religion—Beauty.<sup>1</sup>

That the adoration of Beauty was, indeed, the perpetual act

<sup>1</sup> The Ruskin of Monsieur de la Sizeranne. Ruskin has been regarded until now, and rightly, as Monsieur de la Sizeranne's own particular field of study. If, at times, I make bold to venture on to his ground, it is not because I fail to recognise his rights as first-comer. Before, therefore, entering upon a subject which, at every turn, is overshadowed by the magnificent monument which he has raised to Ruskin, I wish to do him homage and to pay him tribute.



of Ruskin's life, may be strictly true: but, in my view, the goal of that life, its profound, secret and constant intention, was something quite different. If I say this it is with no wish merely to contradict Monsieur de la Sizeranne, but because I want to save him from falling in the estimation of his readers as the result of a false, though natural and, perhaps, inevitable, misinterpretation.

Not only was Ruskin's religion, religion in the strict sense (and I shall return to this point later, because it dominates and characterises the whole of his æsthetic), but, if we are to insist on this 'Religion of Beauty', I must warn my contemporaries that such a phrase can be used, in relation to Ruskin, only if we correct the implication of dilettante æstheticism which too often goes with it. To a dilettante and æsthetic age, a man who adores Beauty is one who, observing no other religion, and regarding her as his sole Divinity, passes his life in the enjoyment to be found in the voluptuous contemplation of works of art.

Now, for reasons the metaphysical basis of which are irrelevant to a mere essay on art, Beauty can never be loved fruitfully if it is loved only for the pleasure it can give. Just as the seeking of happiness for its own sake brings only boredom, because happiness can be found by those alone who set themselves to find something else; similarly, æsthetic pleasure comes to us as an added delight if we love Beauty for herself as something real that exists outside us, something infinitely more important than the pleasure it affords. Far from having been a dilettante and an æsthete, Ruskin, actually, was just the contrary—a man, like Carlyle, whose genius told him that all pleasure is vanity, and, at the same time, that there exists, close at hand, an eternal reality which inspiration can perceive intuitively. Talent is given to such men as a means of fixing this reality, to whose All-might and Eternity they dedicate themselves with enthusiasm and in obedience to the dictates of conscience, thereby giving value to their own limited existence. Such men, focussing anxious and attentive eyes upon the universe which it is their task to interpret, are made aware



of aspects of reality upon which their special gifts shed a particular quality of light. Their steps are guided by a sort of dæmon: they hear voices; they are, in short, inspired by that eternal inspiration which is the property of genius. Ruskin's special gift was his feeling for beauty in nature as well as in art. It was in Beauty that he was led by his temperament to seek Reality, and his life, which was entirely given to religion, was consequently orientated to æsthetic pursuits. But this Beauty to which he thus found himself dedicated, was conceived by him not as an object of delight, made to give him pleasure, but as a reality infinitely more important than life itself, for which he would have given his own. That, you will discover, was the starting-point of all Ruskin's æsthetic philosophy. From the very beginning you must understand that the years in which he discovered a new school of architecture may be considered as the outstanding dates in his moral life. He could speak of the time when Gothic art was first revealed to him with the same gravity, the same emotional insistence, the same serenity, as a Christian speaks of the moment when his eyes were first opened to the Truth. The events of his life were intellectual, and its important dates are those on which he came to an understanding of a new form of art—the year in which he understood Abbeville, the year in which he understood Rouen, the day when Titian's painting, and the use of shadow in Titian's painting, appeared to him as nobler than the painting of Rubens or Rubens' use of shadow.

You must understand next, that, the poet being for Ruskin, as for Carlyle, a sort of scribe imparting, at the dictation of nature, a more or less important part of her secret, he saw the first duty of the artist as an adding of nothing of his own to the divine message. Looked at from this high level, the reproach of realism, as well as that of intellectualism, will be seen to vanish like low-lying mist. If these objections lack validity, it is because their aim is not sufficiently lofty. The error in these criticisms is an error of altitude. The reality which it is the duty of the artist to record is at once material and intellectual. The matter is real because it is the expression of the spirit.



## A MASSACRE OF CHURCHES

As to mere surface appearances, no one has inveighed more loudly than Ruskin against the idea that the aim of art is imitation.

The simple pleasure in the imitation would be precisely of the same degree (if the accuracy could be equal), whether the subject of it were the hero or his horse . . . We may consider tears as the result of agony or of art, whichever we please, but not of both at the same moment. If we are surprised by them as an attainment of the one, it is impossible we can be moved by them as a sign of the other.

If he attaches so much importance to the appearance of things, it is only because appearance reveals their inner nature. Monsieur de la Sizeranne has given us an admirable translation of a passage in which Ruskin shows that the main structural lines of a tree allow us to see just what evil trees have thrust it aside, what winds have tormented it, etc. The configuration of an object is not only the image of its nature, it is the key-word of its destiny, the epitome of its history.

Another consequence of such a conception of art is this: if reality is one and undivided, and if the man of genius is he who perceives it, what does it matter whether the material in which he expresses his vision is paint, stone, music, laws or actions? Carlyle, in his *Heroes*, draws no distinction between Shakespeare and Cromwell, between Mahomet and Burns. Emerson includes among his *Representative Men*, both Swedenborg and Montaigne. Where this system goes wrong is in laying all the stress on the singleness of the reality interpreted, in not allowing sufficiently for differences between the varying modes of interpretation. Carlyle says that Boccaccio and Petrarch could not help being good diplomats because they were good poets. Ruskin commits the same fault when he says that 'the dignity of any composition, and the praise to which it is entitled, are in exact proportion to its independency of language or expression'. It seems to me that if Ruskin's theory



errs at all, it is in this. For painting can pierce to the unchanging reality of things, and so establish itself as a rival to literature, only if it is not literary.

If Ruskin tells us that it is the artist's duty to obey scrupulously those 'voices' of genius which tell him what is real and ought to be transcribed, it is because he himself had felt what is true in inspiration, what is infallible in enthusiasm, what is fruitful in respect. But although what excites enthusiasm, what commands respect, what provokes inspiration, may be different for each one of us, each ends by attributing to his own particular stimulant an especially sacred character. One can say that for Ruskin, this revelation, this guide, was the Bible.

Let us call a halt at this fixed point, this centre of gravity of Ruskin's æsthetic. It was his religious feeling that directed his æsthetic feeling. And, first of all, to those who might be tempted to maintain that this attitude was injurious, that with his artistic appreciation of monuments, statues and paintings, he mingled religious considerations which have nothing to do with it, I would reply that precisely the opposite is true. The divine 'something' which Ruskin held to underly the feeling roused in him by works of art, was precisely what was deepest and most original in that feeling, what imposed itself on his taste and was not susceptible of modification. The religious respect which he brought to the expression of this feeling, his fear of distorting it in any way during the process of transcription, prevented him, contrary to what is often supposed, from ever mingling with the impressions aroused in him by the contemplation of works of art any deliberate activity of reason such as would have been alien to their nature. So true is this, that those who see in him a moralist and an apostle, loving in art what is not art at all, are just as wrong as those who, neglecting the profound essence of his æsthetic feeling, confuse it with the response of a self-indulgent dilettante. His religious fervour was not only the sign of his æsthetic sincerity; it reinforced it and protected it from all attacks coming from the outside. Whether this or that conception of his transcendental æsthetic be false, is, in my opinion, of no importance. Anyone who



knows anything about the laws which govern the development of genius, knows that its strength is to be measured more by the power of its beliefs than by the ability of the object of those beliefs to satisfy commonsense. But since Ruskin's Christianity lay at the very heart of his intellectual nature, his artistic preferences, which were no less deep, were necessarily connected with it. Just as love for Turner's landscapes corresponded, in Ruskin, to that love of nature which gave him his greatest happiness, so, too, there corresponded to the profoundly Christian nature of his thought that permanent predilection, dominating the whole of his life and the whole of his work, for what may be called Christian art, for the architecture and sculpture of the French Middle Ages, for the sculpture and painting of the Middle Ages in Italy. There is no need to look in his life for evidence of the disinterested passion with which he adored these things: it is clear for all to see in his work. So vast was his experience, that quite often knowledge, the depth of which is proved beyond doubt in one of his books, is not used at all, is not so much as mentioned, even indirectly, in other books where it would be strictly relevant. So rich is he that he never lends us his words, but gives them without asking for them back. You know, for instance, that he wrote a volume on the cathedral of Amiens. It would be natural to conclude from that fact that Amiens was the cathedral of all others that he loved the best and knew most about. But, in the *Seven Lamps of Architecture*, where the cathedral of Rouen is referred to forty times in illustration of his argument, and Bayeux nine times, Amiens is not mentioned once. In *Val d'Arno* he tells us that the church which most intoxicated him with the Gothic was that of St Urbain de Troyes. Now, neither in the *Seven Lamps*, nor in the *Bible of Amiens* is St Urbain so much as mentioned.<sup>1</sup> You may think, perhaps, that the absence of all

<sup>1</sup> Actually, there is in *The Seven Lamps* one reference to St Urbain, and one (but only in the Preface to the Second Edition) to Amiens, whereas there are constant references to Abbeville, Avranches, Bayeux,



reference to Amiens in the *Seven Lamps* may be due to his having come to know Amiens only at the end of his life. But that is not so. In 1859, in the course of a lecture given at Kensington, he made an extended comparison of the *Gilded Virgin* of Amiens with the statues executed with less technical skill, though with much deeper feeling, that seem to support the west porch at Chartres. Now, in the *Bible of Amiens*, where we might expect that he would have assembled all that he had ever thought about Amiens, though he devotes many pages to the *Gilded Virgin*, he never once alludes in them to the statues at Chartres. Such are the infinite riches of his love and of his knowledge. As a rule, we find a writer regularly returning, time and time again, to certain favourite illustrative examples, sometimes even repeating certain arguments; and when that is so we are reminded that we are dealing with a man who lived a highly individual life, was equipped with knowledge about some things, but not about others, and had enjoyed a strictly limited experience which he wished to turn to the very best advantage. Merely by consulting the indexes of Ruskin's many volumes, noting the continual variety of the works quoted, and, still more, the scorn with which he refuses to make any further use of knowledge which has been already employed, sometimes going so far as to turn his back on it once and for all—noting these things, one gets the idea that one is in contact with powers more than human, or, rather, that each separate book is by a different writer, each knowing things that Ruskin never knew, each having lived a life and enjoyed experience quite other than his.

Being thus inexhaustibly rich, he found delight in taking from the marvellous casket of his mind treasures that were ever new: on one day, a precious rose-window from Amiens, on another, the golden lace-work of the porch at Abbeville, and proceeding to marry them with the glittering jewels of Italy.

Beauvais, Bourges, Caen, Caudebec, Chartres, Coutances, Falaise, Lisieux, Paris, Rheims, Rouen and St-Lô, in France alone.



## A MASSACRE OF CHURCHES

He could, indeed, pass in this way from one country to another, because the spirit which he had adored in the stones of Pisa was the same as the spirit which had given to the stones of Chartres their immortal form. No one ever felt more deeply than he did the unity of medieval Christian art, from the banks of the Somme to those of the Arno, and he brought to life in our hearts that dream of a 'Christian Europe' which had haunted the great Popes of the Middle Ages. If, as has been argued, his name must remain for ever connected with pre-Raphaelitism, we should understand by the phrase, not those artistic developments that came after Turner, but those that preceded Raphael. We can afford, today, to forget the services which he rendered to Hunt, to Rossetti and to Millais; but what he did for Giotto, for Carpaccio and for Bellini, we cannot forget. His divine work consisted not in raising up the living but in breathing new life into the dead. Does not this unity of Christian medieval art continually shine out from the long vista of those pages in which his imagination occasionally touches the stones of France with the magic light of Italy? We have seen already how, in *Pleasures of England*, he compared Giotto's painting of Charity with the figure of Charity at Amiens. But note, too, how, in *The Nature of Gothic*, he compares the way in which flames are treated in Italian Gothic and in French, taking as his example of the latter the porch of St-Maclou at Rouen. Note, too, how, in *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, where he speaks of the same porch, some of the colours of Italy seem to play about the greyness of its stones:

The subject of the tympanum bas-relief (at St-Maclou) is the Last Judgment, and the sculpture of the inferno is carried out with a degree of power whose fearful grotesqueness I can only describe as a mingling of the minds of Orcagna and Hogarth. The demons are perhaps more awful than Orcagna's; and in some of the expressions of debased humanity in its utmost despair, the English painter is at least equalled. Not less wild is the imagination



that gives fury and fear even to the placing of the figures. An evil angel, poised on the wing, drives the condemned troops from before the Judgment seat . . . They are urged by him so furiously, that they are driven not merely to the extreme level of that scene, which the sculptor confined elsewhere within the tympanum, but out of the tympanum and *into the niches* of the arch; while the flames that follow them, bent by the blast, as it seems, of the angel's wings, rush into the niches also, and burst up *through their tracery*, the three lowermost niches being represented as all on fire, while, instead of their usual vaulted and ribbed ceiling, there is a demon in the roof of each with his wings folded over, grinning down out of the black shadow.

But he went deeper than this parallelism between the art forms of different countries. He was struck by the identity of certain religious ideas in Pagan and in Christian symbolism.<sup>1</sup> Monsieur Ary Renan has already, with profound understanding, pointed out how much of Christ there is in Gustave Moreau's Prometheus. Ruskin, whose devotion to Christian art never led him to feel contempt for Paganism, has, with a feeling at once æsthetic and religious, compared the lion of St Jerome with the lion of Nemea, Virgil with Dante, Samson with Hercules, Theseus with the Black Prince, and the predictions of Isaiah with those of the Sybil of Cumae. This is not the place to make a comparison between Ruskin and Gustave Moreau, but it may be said that a natural tendency, developed as the result of long familiarity with the Primitives, led both men to insist

<sup>1</sup> In *St Mark's Rest*, he goes so far as to maintain that 'there is but one Greek school, from Homer's day down to the Doge Selvo's' (cp the passage in *The Bible of Amiens*, in which he traces the descent from Daedalus, the first sculptor, of 'imagery *pathetic* with human life' such as we find it in the architects who constructed the ancient labyrinth of Amiens.) While, among the mosaics in the Baptistery of St Mark's, he recognises a Harpy in a Seraphim, a cup-bearer in the figure of Herodias, and a Greek vase in a golden cupola.



on the exclusion of the representation of all violent feeling from art, and to indulge in a certain degree of fetishism, which was expressed in their adoration of the symbol for the symbol's sake, a form of fetishism not likely to do harm to minds like theirs, which, fundamentally, were so deeply attached to the feeling symbolised that they could pass from one symbol to another without finding any obstacle in mere surface differences. As to the reasoned prohibition of all expression of violent sentiment in art, where can we find a clearer statement of what Monsieur Ary Renan has called 'the principle of beautiful inertia' than in the pages of *The Relation of Michael Angelo to Tintoretto* (*Astra Pentelici*)? As to his somewhat exclusive admiration of symbols, is not that almost necessarily produced by the study of French and Italian medieval art? And since what he sought in any work of art was the underlying spirit of a period, how could he fail to be impressed by the resemblance between the symbols on the porch at Chartres and those of the frescoes at Pisa, since he saw in it a proof of the characteristic originality of the spirit which had animated the artists of that time? In their differences he saw only evidence of its variety. In anyone else there might have been considerable risk of the æsthetic considerations becoming frozen by his reasoning. But with him all was love; and iconography, as he understood it, might better be called iconolatry.<sup>1</sup> There is

<sup>1</sup> Similarly, in *Val d'Arno*, the Lion of St Mark's 'descends in true genealogy from the Lion of Nemea, and the crested skin of him that clothes the head of Heracles of Camarina', with this difference, that 'Heracles kills the beast and makes a helmet and a garment from its skin, while the Greek St Mark converts the animal and turns it into an evangelist.' I have quoted this passage, not with any intention of finding an alternative line of descent for the Nemean Lion, but because I want to stress the argument with which one of the chapters of *The Bible of Amiens* concludes, that 'there is a sacred classic literature'. Ruskin would not allow that one should oppose Greek art to Christian art, but only to Gothic (*Val d'Arno*). 'For St Mark is just as much Greek as Heracles'. We are here in the presence of one of Ruskin's most important theories, or, more precisely, one of the most original feelings which he brought to bear on the contemplation



a point at which art-criticism yields to something which may, indeed, be greater; to something that employs almost the methods of science, to something that contributes to history. The appearance of a fresh attribute in the porch of a cathedral tells us as much about the changes that have taken place, not only in the development of art, but in the movement of

and study of the works of Greek and Christian art. If we are to understand it correctly, we should turn to a passage in *St Mark's Rest* which, in my opinion, is the one above all others contained in his works from which emerges most clearly, and can be seen most plainly in operation, that peculiar mental disposition which led him, so far from stressing the importance of the coming of Christianity, to see the presence of Christian beauty in Pagan art, to follow the continuity of the Hellenic ideal through the productions of the Middle Ages. There can be no doubt that this mental 'slant', which I regard as being entirely æsthetic, at least logically in regard to its nature, if not chronologically in its origin, became systematised in Ruskin's mind, and was extended to his critical work in the fields of history and religion. But even when he compares Greek and Frankish conceptions of Royalty (*Val d'Arno*: the chapter entitled *Frankness*), when, in the *Bible of Amiens*, he declares that Christianity did not bring about much change in the ideals of virtue and human happiness, when he speaks, in a passage which I have already quoted, of the religion of Horace, he was only drawing theoretical conclusions from the æsthetic pleasure which he had found in recognising a cup-bearer in Herodias, a harpy in a seraphim, and a Greek vase in a Byzantine cupola. Here is the passage from *St Mark's Rest* to which I refer: 'And this is true, not of Byzantine art only, but of all Greek art, *pur sang*. Let us leave today the narrow and degrading word "Byzantine." There is but one Greek school from Homer's day down to the Doge Selvo's' (We might say from the days of Theognis to those of the Comtesse Mathieu de Noailles), 'and these St Mark's mosaics are as truly wrought in the power of Athens, with the Greek religious soul, as ever chest of Cypselus or shaft of Erectheum.'

Then Ruskin takes us into the Baptistry of St Mark's: 'Over the door is Herod's feast. Herodias' daughter dances with St John Baptist's head in the charger, on her head,—simply the translation of any Greek maid on a Greek vase, bearing a pitcher of water on her head . . . Pass on now into the farther chapel under the darker dome. Darker, and very dark;—to my old eyes, scarcely decipherable; to yours, if young and bright, it should be beautiful, for it is, indeed, the origin of all those golden-domed backgrounds of Bellini, and Cima, and Carpaccio; itself a Greek vase, but with new Gods. That ten-



civilisation, as the geologist can deduce from the appearance of a new species on the earth. Stones carved by nature are no more instructive than stones carved by man, and human knowledge derives no more from those that preserve the fossil of a primeval monster, than from those that express the visible realisation of a new God.

winged cherub in the recess of it, behind the altar, has written on the circle on its breast, 'Fulness of Wisdom'. It is the type of the breath of the Spirit. But it was once a Greek Harpy, and its wasted limbs remain, scarcely yet clothed with flesh, from the claws of birds that they were . . . Above, Christ Himself ascends, borne in a whirlwind of angels; and, as the vaults of Bellini and Carpaccio are only the amplification of the Harpy-Vault, so the Paradise of Tintoret is only the final fulfillment of the thought in this narrow cupola . . . These mosaics are not earlier than the thirteenth century.

'And yet they are still absolutely Greek in all modes of thought, and forms of tradition. The Fountains of fire and water are merely forms of the Chimera and the Peirene; and the maid dancing, though a princess of the thirteenth century in sleeves of ermine, is yet the phantom of some sweet water-carrier from an Arcadian spring.' (See too, where Ruskin says 'I am alone, so far as I know, in still thinking as Herodotus thought.') Anyone sufficiently sensitive to be struck by the characteristic traits of a writer, and not necessarily adhering, in this matter of Ruskin, to all that he may have been told to the effect that Ruskin was a prophet, a seer, a protestant, and many other things that do not mean very much, will feel that such traits, though secondary, are nevertheless, very 'Ruskinian'. Ruskin lives in a sort of fraternal community with the great spirits of all times, and, because he is interested in them only to the extent that they can provide an answer to the eternal questions, draws no distinction between ancient and modern, and can speak of Herodotus as he would of a contemporary. Since, for him, the ancients are of value only in proportion as they are 'actual', and can serve to illustrate our daily thinking, he does not treat them in any way as ancients. But their words, not being for him mere old-fashioned rubbish, not being viewed by his eyes as merely relative to a particular period, are by so much more important to him, and retain, to some extent, the scientific value which they might originally have had, but which they lost through the passage of time. From the way in which Horace speaks to the Fountain of Bandusia, Ruskin concludes that he was pious, 'just as Milton was pious'. Already, when eleven years old, and learning the Odes of Anacreon for his pleasure, he had discovered with certainty what 'has been extremely advantageous to me to know, that the Greeks liked



The drawings that accompany Ruskin's text are, from this point of view, highly significant. On a single plate you will find the same architectural motif as it is treated at Lisieux, Bayeux, Verona and Padua, just exactly as though he were concerned with the same species of butterfly under varying climatic conditions. But the stones which he loved so dearly never become for him mere abstract examples. Each one of them shows not only the light of a particular moment as it struck the surface, but the colour of the centuries as well. 'Rushing down the street', he tells us, 'to see St Wulfran before the sun was off the towers . . . was always for me one of those things to cherish the past for—to the end.' But he went even further. He made no separation between the

doves, swallows and roses just as well as I did'. Clearly, Emerson attached the same value to 'culture'. But without even stopping to consider the differences between the two men, which are profound, I would point out, in my endeavour to stress the particular characteristics of Ruskin's physiognomy that, since for him, there was no difference between science and art, he speaks of the ancients as men of science with as much reverence as he speaks of the ancients as artists. When he has to deal with the discoveries of natural science, he quotes the 114th Psalm, ranges himself with Herodotus (quite willing to oppose that writer to a contemporary man of learning) on a question of religious history, and admires a painting by Carpaccio as making an important contribution to the descriptive history of parrots (*St Mark's Rest: The Shrine of the Slaves*). Obviously, we are well on our way to his theory of classic religious art. 'There is only one art of Greece', etc—'St Jerome and Hercules' etc, the various theories leading each to the others. But for the moment we are concerned only with Ruskin as a man tenderly devoted to his library, seeing no difference between science and art, and, consequently, being persuaded that a scientific theory may remain true, just as a work of art remains beautiful (this theory is never explicitly stated by him but it secretly dominates and could alone make possible all the others), seeking in a classic ode or a medieval bas-relief for information about natural history or critical philosophy, convinced that wise men in all ages and all lands are better worth consulting than any fool, no matter how contemporary. Naturally, this tendency is repressed by a critical sense so sure that we can trust it absolutely. He exaggerates only for the pleasure of making little jokes about the entomology of the thirteenth century, etc, etc.



cathedrals and the river valleys where the approaching visitor catches sight of the great churches, as in some picture of the Primitives. One of the most instructive of his drawings in this respect is the one shown in the second engraving of *Our Fathers Have Told Us*. In these cities, Amiens, Abbeville, Beauvais, Rouen, made sacred by his stay in them, he spent his time drawing, sometimes in the churches ('without being troubled by the sacristan'), sometimes in the open air. There can have been few more charming birds of passage in these towns than the flock of sketchers and engravers whom he carried about with him. We are reminded of the description left to us by Plato, of Protagoras moving from city to city always accompanied by his little party of Sophists, or of a flight of swallows, perching for choice on the old roofs and the ancient towers of cathedrals. It may still be possible to discover a few of those disciples of Ruskin who went with him to the banks of a Somme that had been blessed by the visit of a new Evangelist, as though the times of St Firmin and St Salvius had come again, and, while this latter-day apostle talked, explaining Amiens in terms of the Bible, made, not notes, but sketches, graceful reminders which now, no doubt, lie in some English museum, showing, I imagine, a slightly formalised version of reality in the manner of Viollet-le-Duc. The picture of *Amiens: All Souls' Day* seems slightly to have distorted fact in the interests of a beautiful effect. Are the cathedral and the church of St-Leu, we wonder, thus seen in perspective, quite like that? Is the Somme really so wide? True, Ruskin might reply by using the words of Turner which he quotes in *The Eagle's Nest*.

Turner [he says] in his early life was sometimes good-natured, and would show people what he was about. He was one day making a drawing of Plymouth harbour, with some ships at the distance of a mile or two, seen against the light. Having shown this drawing to a naval officer, the naval officer observed with surprise, and objected with very justifiable indignation, that the ships of the line had no portholes. 'No', said Turner, 'certainly not. If you



will walk up to Mount Edgecumbe, and look at the ships against the sunset, you will find you can't see the portholes. 'Well, but', said the naval officer, still indignant, 'you know the portholes are there.' 'Yes', said Turner, 'I know that well enough; but my business is to draw what I see, and not what I know is there.'

If, when at Amiens, you walk towards the municipal slaughter-house, you will get a view not very different from that shown in the engraving to which I refer. You will notice that the effect of distance is to show the monuments in much the same distorted, satisfying, composition as the artist has recorded, though if you move closer they will resume their original relation to one another, and look quite different. You will notice, for instance, that one of the effects of this same distance is to superimpose on the façade of the cathedral one of the city's hydraulic pumps, and to transpose into an arrangement of plane geometry what, in fact, is three-dimensional. But if, allowing for that, you still find that this view, composed with considerable taste, by the cunning fingers of perspective, is slightly different from the one shown by Ruskin in his drawing, you must blame the changed appearance of the town in the twenty years that have elapsed since his visit. To use a phrase of Ruskin's own, when referring to another place much loved by him, 'various improvements have taken place since I last composed or meditated there.'

But at least this drawing in the *Bible of Amiens* will establish in your memory certain relations between the banks of the Somme and the cathedral which you would probably never have recognised by the exercise of your own unaided vision, no matter from what aspect you had viewed the city. It will prove to you better than any words of mine could do, that Ruskin did not separate the beauty of cathedrals from the charm of the countryside in which they had been built, and which all who visit them can still enjoy in the poetical and golden light which the afternoon imparts to them. Not only is the first chapter of the *Bible of Amiens* called 'The Rivers



of Waters', but the book which Ruskin planned to write about the cathedral of Chartres was to have had as title, *The Springs of Eure*. So it was not only in his drawings that he set cathedrals on the banks of rivers, or associated the grandeur of Gothic churches with the gracious countryside of France<sup>1</sup>.

We should feel with far greater intensity the individuality which constitutes the charm of a particular countryside, if we had not at our disposition those seven-league boots, the great express trains of our modern age: if we had, as formerly, wishing to reach some chosen corner, to pass through stretches of landscape which more and more take on, as we approach our goal, its ultimate character and colouring, like the modulations of a harmony, and thus, by making it less easily penetrable by what is alien, by protecting it with tenderness and a linked mystery of resemblance, and not merely by hedging it round with the defences of nature, prepare our hearts and minds for its reception.

These studies of Ruskin on the subject of Christian art served him, in some sort, as a verification of, as a counter to, his ideas on Christianity, and other ideas, too, into which I have not here the time to enter, but the most famous of which, his horror of machine-production and industrial art, Ruskin shall be allowed, a little later on, to define in his own words. 'All beautiful things were made when the men of the Middle Ages *believed* in the pure, joyous and lovely lesson of Christianity.' He saw art as declining from that point onwards, with the decline of faith, mere technical skill taking the place of feeling. And as he noted the power of giving tangible form to beauty which was the product of the ages of faith, his own belief in the excellence of faith must have been strengthened. Each volume of his last work—*Our Fathers Have Told Us* (of which only the first was written) was to have had four chapters, the

<sup>1</sup> What an interesting collection could be made of French landscapes seen through English eyes: Turner's pictures of the rivers of France: Bonnington's *Versailles*: Walter Pater's *Auxerre*: Stevenson's *Fontainebleau*, and many others.



last being devoted to the masterpiece which best represented the full flowering of that particular aspect of faith which it had been the business of the first three to study. In this way, Christianity, in which Ruskin's æsthetic feelings had been cradled, would have received its supreme consecration. And then, having permitted himself a brief excursion into humour, as he led his Protestant lady visitor to the statue of the Madonna—'be pleased to recollect . . . that neither Madonna-worship, nor Lady-worship of any sort . . . ever did any human creature any harm', or to the statue of St Honoré, after deploring that this saint is 'so little talked of now in his Parisian faubourg',—he might have said, as he says at the end of *Val d'Arno*:

If you will fix your minds only on the conditions of human life which the Giver of it demands,—'He hath shown thee, Oh man, what is good, and what doth thy hand require of thee, but to do justice, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?'—you will find that such obedience is always acknowledged by temporal blessing. If, turning from the manifest miseries of cruel ambition, and manifest wanderings of insolent belief, you summon to your thoughts rather the state of unrecorded multitudes, who laboured in silence, and adored in humility, widely as the snows of Christendom brought memory of the Birth of Christ, or her spring sunshine of His Resurrection, you may know that the promise of the Bethlehem angels has been literally fulfilled; and will pray that your English fields, joyfully as the banks of Arno, may still dedicate their pure lilies to St Mary of the Flower.

Finally, Ruskin's medieval studies confirmed, not only his belief in the excellence of faith, but his belief in the necessity of free work, of work done with joy, and with men's own hands, without the intervention of machinery. That you may fully realise this, I will here transcribe one of Ruskin's most characteristic passages. He is speaking of a tiny figure, only a



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few inches in height, lost among the hundreds of other tiny figures over the Library Door at Rouen Cathedral.

The fellow is vexed and puzzled in his malice; and his hand is pressed hard on his cheek-bone, and the flesh of the cheek is *wrinkled* under the eye by the pressure. The whole, indeed, looks wretchedly coarse, when it is seen on a scale in which it is naturally compared with delicate figure-etchings: but considering it as a mere filling of an interstice on the outside of a cathedral gate, and one of more than three hundred . . . it proves very noble vitality in the art of the time . . .

. . . We have certain work to do for our bread, and that is to be done strenuously; other work to do for our delight, and that is to be done heartily; neither is to be done by halves and shifts, but with a will; and what is not worth this effort is not to be done at all. Perhaps all that we have to do is meant for nothing more than an exercise of the heart and of the will, and is useless in itself; but, at all events, the little use it has may well be spared if it is not worth putting our hearts and our strength to. It does not become our immortality to take an ease inconsistent with its authority, nor to suffer any instruments with which it can dispense, to come between it and the things it rules . . . There is dreaming enough, and earthiness enough, and sensuality enough in human existence, without our turning the few glowing moments of it into mechanism; and since our life must at the best be but a vapour that appears for a little time and then vanishes away, let it at least appear as a cloud in the height of Heaven, not as the thick darkness that broods over the blast of the Furnace and rolling of the wheel.

Let me confess that when I read this passage at the moment of Ruskin's death, I was seized by a desire to see the little man about whom he speaks. So I went to Rouen as though in obedience to a testamentary behest, as though Ruskin, at the



moment of death, had, in some sort, bequeathed to his readers that poor creature into whom he had, with his words, breathed the breath of life, who, without knowing it, had just lost for ever one who had done as much for him as the craftsman who had carved him. But when I reached the huge cathedral, and stood before the door where the saints were warming themselves in the sun, and before those still higher galleries where the kings stood resplendent, and raised my eyes to those supreme heights of stone which I thought to be uninhabited, but where a carved hermit dwelt in isolation, letting the birds roost upon his forehead, while, nearby, a fraternity of apostles hearkened to the message of an angel who had alighted not far off, folding his wings beneath a flight of pigeons with their own full spread, and not far from the figure of a man who, with an infant on his back, was turning his head over his shoulder with a brusque movement that is as natural today as when it was first achieved; when I saw ranged before the porch, or leaning from the ledges of the towers, all the stone hosts of the mystic city, breathing the sunlight or the mists of morning, I realised that it would be impossible to find amidst this superhuman army, one figure of a few inches only in height. Nevertheless, I went to the Library Door. But how was I to recognise that tiny figure among all those hundreds of others? Suddenly, a talented young sculptor, who has a future before her, Mrs L. Yeatman, said: 'This one looks like him.' We lowered the direction of our gaze, and there, sure enough, he was—no more than three or four inches high. The surface had been worn away, but the look in the eyes was the same. The holes with which the craftsman had stressed the pupils were still there, and, more than anything else, were responsible for the expression which led me to identify the figure. The centuries-dead artist had left it there, among a thousand others—a mannikin whom death obliterates a little more each day, and the artist, too, has long been lost among the crowd of his old contemporaries. But he it was who had set the figure there. And then, so many years afterwards, came a stranger, one for whom there was no death, no anonymous infinity of matter, no forgetfulness: one who



thrust from him that sense of nothingness that lies like a burden on the shoulders of all of us, and journeyed straight on to the profundities that ruled his life, profundities so numerous that he could never reach them all, though for us they are all too few. He came, this stranger, and, seeing in the waves of stone where every fretted crest seems to resemble its neighbour, all the laws of life and all the thoughts of the soul, said, giving to each its name—‘See here, see there’—so that at the Day of Judgment—which is figured not far off in an image of stone—his words shall be heard like the trumpet of the Archangel, and he shall say: ‘Those who have lived once shall live for ever: matter is nothing.’ And, indeed just as the dead who are shown, near by, in the tympanum, waking to the Archangel’s blast, shall rise, having put on again the form that was theirs in life, recognisable, living—so, too, this tiny figure lives again, and the light has been rekindled in his eyes, and the Judge has said: ‘You have lived once, you shall live for ever.’ For him who carved it the voice is no voice of an immortal Judge, and his body shall, indeed, be consumed. But what matters that, since he has been fated not to die, having accomplished an immortal task, concerned not with the great matters that filled his age, having but one human life to live, and giving not a little of it to one single figure among the many thousands in the entry to a church. The judge made a drawing of it. For him it was the expression of those thoughts which had moved obscurely in a brain recking nought of old age to come. He made a drawing, and he has spoken of it, so that the tiny, harmless, monstrous figure has put on new life, has, contrary to all expectation, risen from that death which seems more absolute than death in other forms, since it has condemned him to disappear in the anonymity of a multitude where he is overwhelmed by a thousand others like himself, an anonymity from which he has been rescued by the word of genius, and we with him. Finding him there, we cannot but be touched. He seems to live again, to look at us with an eye revived, or rather, looking thus, to have been rapt away by death as were those people of Pompeii who were caught by destruction



in the very act of making a gesture which has remained for ever incomplete. It was, indeed, the sculptor's thought that was caught here in its very movement and hardened into stone. I was touched, finding the figure, because I realised that what once has lived can never die, not the sculptor's thought, nor Ruskin's.

And coming there upon that tiny image which had been so necessary to Ruskin, that, among the very few drawings that illustrate *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, he gave to it one whole plate because it was the expression of a real and durable part of his thought, and is pleasing to us because we stand in need of that thought to guide our own, we feel in ourselves, looking at it, a state of mind near to that of those artists who carved on many a tympanum the images of the Last Judgment, and held that the individual, what is most private and central to all of us, the very keystone of our wills, dies not at all, but lives on in the memory of God and shall rise again. Who is right, the grave-digger or Hamlet? The one sees only a skull, the other remembers a man of infinite jest. Science replies, 'the grave-digger', but in saying so, it leaves Shakespeare out of account. For Shakespeare has kept alive the memory of that infinite jest long after the skull has crumbled into dust. At the call of the Angel, the dead stay, each in his appointed place, though we may think them dust these many years. At the call of Ruskin we see a minute figure, set in minute tracery, brought back to life, so that he gazes at us with the same expression he has had throughout the centuries, recorded though it is in a bare millimetre of stone. Unaided, I could never, among the many million stones in all the cities of the world, have found you out, poor tiny monster, could never have identified your face, discovered your personality, called you forth and made you live again. But that is only because infinity, and number, and the nothingness whose load is upon us, are strong, whereas my powers of thought are not strong at all. There is nothing in you that might truly be called beauty. Your poor little face, which I should never have noticed, holds no very interesting expression, though, obviously, like that of every person in the



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world, it is individual, having nowhere else its counterpart. But such is the strength of life in you, that your sidelong look is still vivid enough for Ruskin to have picked you out, and for us, his readers, to recognise you still. Have you now the life for which you longed, and the love? I cannot think of you without some tenderness, not because you are particularly prepossessing, but because you are a living creature, because for long centuries you were dead without hope of resurrection, and now are risen again. And one of these days, maybe, another traveller will find you in your porch, and will gaze with tenderness upon your risen face with its look of squint-eyed malice, because what was born of a thought can lay hold only on the thought of another, and so be shown to us who have felt its fascination. You did well to stay there in your porch, unregarded, worn by sun and wind. Useless to set your hopes on matter, for as matter you were but nothingness. But children have nothing to fear, nor have the dead. For sometimes the Spirit walks upon the earth, and at His passing the dead rise up, and the small, forgotten faces look out again upon the living, who, for their sake, turn from those other living who are not truly alive, and seek for life there only where the Spirit shows it, in stones which, though they have already turned to dust, are living thought.

He who wrapped about the old cathedrals a richer mantle of love and joy than can the sun when he adds his passing smile to their age-old beauty, cannot, if we truly understand him, have been wrong. It is, in the world of spirits, as in the physical universe, where water cannot rise higher than its source. The supreme beauties of literature correspond to something, and it may well be that, in art, enthusiasm is the criterion of truth. Even if we allow that Ruskin may sometimes have erred, as a critic, in the precise value that he attached to any given work, the beauty of his wrong judgment is often more attaching than that of the work judged, and corresponds to something which, though it may be different from that beauty, is no less precious. That Ruskin is wrong when he says that



the *Beau Dieu d'Amiens* 'was beyond what till then had been reached in sculptured tenderness', and that Monsieur Huysmans is right when he describes this same God of Amiens as having 'the face of a simpering sheep', I do not believe, nor is there any point in trying to resolve the discord. Whether or no the *Beau Dieu d'Amiens* is what Ruskin believed it to be, is, for us, entirely unimportant. Buffon has said that 'the varieties of intellectual beauty (in a fine style), the relationships that combine to make it what it is, are truths just as useful as, and perhaps more precious for men's minds, than an understanding of the subject of which it treats.' Similarly, the truths which go to make up the beauty of those passages on the *God* to be found in the *Bible of Amiens*, have a value that is quite independent of the figure itself. Ruskin would never have achieved them had he spoken of it with scorn, for enthusiasm alone made it possible for him to discover what he there describes.

Just how far that marvellous spirit faithfully reflected the universe, and in what appealing and alluring shapes falsehood may have crept, in spite of everything, into the very heart of his intellectual sincerity, is something that we shall probably never be able to discover, and into which, in any case, I cannot here enquire. Whatever the answer to that question may be, he was most certainly one of those geniuses of whom even those of us who were blessed by good fairies at our birth, have need, if we are to be initiated into the knowledge and love of a new realm of beauty. As coins bear the effigy of the ruling monarch, so are many of the words used by our contemporaries for the communication of their thoughts, marked with *his* imprint. Though he is no longer alive, he lights us still, like those dead stars whose radiance still reaches us; and it may be said of him, as he said of Turner: 'It is through these eyes now closed for ever in the grave, that generations yet unborn will look on nature'.

In what appealing and alluring shapes falsehood may have crept into the very heart of his intellectual sincerity . . .

What I meant, when I used those words, was this. There is a



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kind of idolatry which has never been better defined than by Ruskin himself in a passage of *Lectures on Art*:

Such I conceive generally, though indeed with good arising out of it, for every great evil brings some good in its backward eddies—such I conceive to have been the deadly function of art in its ministry to what, whether in heathen or Christian lands, and whether in the pageantry of words, or colours, or fair forms, is truly, and in the deep sense, to be called idolatry—the serving with the best of our hearts and minds, some dear or sad fantasy which we have made for ourselves, while we disobey the present call of the Master, who is not dead, and who is not now fainting under His cross, but requires us to take up ours.<sup>1</sup>

Now, I am inclined to believe that it is just this kind of idolatry that we find at the bottom of Ruskin's work, at the root of his talent. Doubtless, he never let it grow to the extent of completely covering—even in the interests of adornment—immobilising, paralysing, and finally killing, his intellectual and moral sincerity. In every line of his books, at every moment of his life, we are conscious of feeling how deeply sincere he needed to be if he were to grapple successfully with the temptations of idolatry, proclaim its vanity, and force beauty to bow her head to the claims of duty, even when that duty was unæsthetic. I do not intend to take examples from his life (which is not, like the lives of Racine, Tolstoy or Maeterlinck, æsthetic first and moral afterwards because, from the very first, he always admitted the claims of morality *within* the confines of the æsthetic—though he never wholly succeeded in freeing himself from it, as did the other masters I have mentioned.) The story of that life is well known, nor need I recall the various stages in its development, beginning with those early scruples of his about drinking tea while looking at Titian's

<sup>1</sup> This passage from Ruskin can be better applied to what I mean by idolatry if it is taken thus in isolation than in its context.



pictures, to that final phase, when, having poured into social and philanthropic work the fortune left him by his father, he decided to sell his Turners. There is a more private and essential dilettantism than the dilettantism of behaviour (over which he did, in fact, triumph), and the real duel between his idolatry and his sincerity was fought out, not at this or that moment of his life, not on this or that page of his books, but at every minute, in those deep and secret regions of the mind, where though men are scarcely aware of its existence, their personality receives its most profound impressions. For it is in those hidden regions that the imagination receives the record of things seen, that intelligence stores up the influence of ideas, that memory is impressed by the impact of thought. By very reason of the choice which a man's essential nature is compelled to make of these things, it performs, incessantly, an act of self-assertion, and so is for ever determining the bent of its spiritual and moral life. It was in those regions, I feel, that Ruskin never wholly ceased to commit the sin of idolatry. At the very moment that he was preaching sincerity, he lacked it. It was not what he said that was insincere, but the manner of his saying. The doctrines he professed were moral, not æsthetic, yet he chose them for their beauty. And because he did not wish to present them formally as things of beauty, but as statements of truth, he was forced to lie to himself about the reasons that had led him to adopt them. And once the start was made, he found himself involved in a compromise with conscience so continuous, that immoral doctrines sincerely professed would, perhaps, have been less dangerous to his spiritual integrity than moral doctrines enunciated with less than sincerity, because they had been dictated by æsthetic considerations which he refused to admit. Nor was the sin occasional. It went on all the time—in the way he explained a fact or appraised a work of art; even in the choice he made of words, so that, in the end, as a result of this never-ceasing indulgence, the whole attitude of his mind became falsified. That I may enable my readers to judge of the kind of illusion produced on them, and on Ruskin himself, by his writings,



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I am going to quote one of his most beautiful passages, a passage in which this particular shortcoming appears in its most flagrant form. We shall see that if the beauty of it is, in *theory* (that is to say, in appearance; because the underlying idea is always, for a writer, appearance, and the form, reality) subordinated to moral feeling and to truth, what has actually happened is that truth and moral feeling have been made subservient to the æsthetic sense—an æsthetic sense, moreover, that has become slightly distorted as a result of the constant process of compromise to which I have referred.

Ruskin is speaking of the *Causes of Venetian Decadence*<sup>1</sup>:

Not in the wantonness of wealth, nor in vain ministry to the desire of the eyes or the pride of life, were those marbles hewn into transparent strength, and those arches arrayed in the colours of the iris. There is a message written in the dyes of them, that once was written in blood; and a sound in the echoes of their vaults, that one day shall fill the vault of heaven. 'He shall return to do judgment and justice.' The strength of Venice was given her so long as she remembered this: her destruction found her when she had forgotten this; and it found her irrevocably because she forgot it without excuse. Never had city a more glorious Bible. Among the nations of the North, a rude and shadowy sculpture filled their temples with confused and hardly legible imagery; but for her, the skill and the treasures of the East had gilded every letter, and illumined every page, till the Book-Temple shone from afar off like the star of the Magi. In other cities, the meetings of the people were often in places withdrawn from religious association, subject to violence and to change; and on the grass of the dangerous rampart, and in the dust of the troubled street, there were

<sup>1</sup> How comes it that Monsieur Barrès, setting himself, in an admirable chapter of his last book, to elect an ideal Senate for Venice, has omitted Ruskin? Has he not greater claims to be included than Léopold Robert or Théophile Gautier, and did he not deserve a seat between Byron and Barrès, or between Goethe and Chateaubriand?



deeds done and counsels taken, which, if we cannot justify, we may sometimes forgive. But the sins of Venice, whether in her Palace or her Piazza, were done with the Bible at her right hand. The walls on which its testimony was written were separated but by a few inches of marble from those which guarded the secrets of her councils, or confined the victims of her policy. And when in her last hours she threw off all shame and all restraint, and the great square of the city became filled with the madness of the whole earth, be it remembered how much her sin was greater, because it was done in the face of the House of God, burning with the letters of His Law. Mountebank and masker laughed their laugh and went their way; and a silence has followed them, not unforeshadowed; for amidst them all, through century after century of gathering vanity and festering guilt, that white dome of St Mark's had uttered in the dead ear of Venice, 'Know thou that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment'.<sup>1</sup>

Now, had Ruskin been entirely sincere with himself, he would not have thought that the sins of the Venetians were less excusable and more severely punished than those of other men because they possessed a church built of many-coloured marbles, instead of a cathedral of limestone; because the Palace of the Doges stood side by side with St Mark's instead of being at the other end of the city, or because, in Byzantine churches the Bible text, instead of being simply imaged, as in the sculptures of our Northern fabrics, is accompanied, in the mosaics, by letters arranged to form quotations from the Gospels or the Prophets. True, this passage from the *Stones of Venice* has much beauty, difficult though it may be to analyse the elements that compose it. But fundamentally, I think, it rests upon a lie, and I feel some scruple about yielding to its charm.

Yet some truth there must be in it. The beauty is not, strictly speaking, wholly false, for the æsthetic pleasure that we derive from it is precisely that which accompanies the discovery of a

<sup>1</sup> *Stones of Venice*: II, IV section 71



truth. What is difficult to determine is the kind of truth to which the lively sense of æsthetic pleasure which we feel in reading such a passage, corresponds. A certain atmosphere of mystery shrouds it: it is as full of images of beauty and religion as is that same church of St Mark, where all the figures of the Old and New Testaments loom through a splendid darkness shot with changing lights. I remember how I read it for the first time sitting in St Mark's on a day of storm and darkness, when the only light came from the material and secreted gold of the mosaics themselves, an ancient and an earthy light, to which the Venetian sun which blazes on the city's buildings, firing the very angels on the summit of the Campaniles, contributed nothing. The emotion that I felt as I read this passage among all the figures that seemed to draw light from the enveloping dusk, was very strong, but not, perhaps, very pure. Just as my pleasure in the contemplation of all those lovely and mysterious forms was increased, but degraded, by my satisfaction in possessing sufficient erudition to understand the texts written in Byzantine lettering beside their aureoled heads, so, too, the beauty of Ruskin's imagery was made vivid, yet corrupted, by my pride in being able to relate it to the sacred words. A sort of egotistical turning-inwards on oneself is an inevitable accompaniment of all such pleasures in which art is mixed with erudition, and in which the æsthetic pleasure, sharpened though it may be, loses something of its purity. Perhaps I find this passage from the *Stones of Venice* beautiful because it gives me the same sort of mingled pleasure that I experienced in St Mark's; because, like that Byzantine church, it, too, has in the shadowed mosaic of its glittering style, a Biblical quotation set beside the images. Is it not rather like those mosaics in St Mark's purposing to instruct and setting little store by the beauty of their art? For us, today, they are merely a source of pleasure. The satisfaction which their didacticism gives to the learned remains egotistical, and the only disinterested pleasure to be drawn from them is the sense of beauty which they produce in the artist, a beauty which was disdained or ignored by those who set out only to teach.



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the people, and gave them beauty only in a windfall.

The passage on the last page of *The Bible of Amiens*, beginning, 'If, preparing yourselves to lie down beneath the grass in silence and loneliness—you would care for the promise . . .', is another example of the same kind of thing. When, too, in the same book, Ruskin ends a short digression on Egypt with the words: 'She was the Tutoress of Moses and the Hostess of Christ . . . '—the phrase about being the 'Tutoress of Moses' can pass muster. Tutoring demands certain virtues. But the fact that she was 'The Hostess of Christ', though the words may add something to the beauty of the passage, can scarcely be considered relevant in an appraisal of the Egyptian genius.

I have here, in my effort to push intellectual sincerity to its furthest, its cruellest limits, to wrestle with my most cherished æsthetic impressions. It should not be necessary for me to add that if, in a spirit, as it were, of high disinterestedness, I enter a general *caveat*, not so much against Ruskin's works, as against the essential nature of their inspiration and the peculiar quality of their beauty, I yet regard him as one of the greatest writers of all times and all countries. What I have denounced is not a weakness peculiar to Ruskin. I have tried, taking him, if I may so put it, as an unusually favourable 'subject', to underline an infirmity that is part and parcel of the human mind. Once the reader has understood the nature of this 'idolatry', he will be in a position to grasp the excessive importance which Ruskin, in his studies of art, attaches to the literal significance of the works with which he is dealing, and also his abuse of such words as 'irreverent' and 'insolent'; of such phrases as 'difficulties which it would be insolence in us to attempt to resolve, a mystery which it is not our business to illuminate', (*The Bible of Amiens*): 'The artist should ever beware of exercising his power to select. His employment of it is an act of insolence', (*Modern Painters*): 'It is just possible for an irreverent person rather to think the nave narrow than the apse high', (*The Bible of Amiens*) etc, etc—and the state of mind which comments of this kind reveal. I was thinking



of this idolatry, (of the pleasure, too, which Ruskin takes in giving to his phrases a balance which has the appearance of imposing *on* his thought, rather than of deriving from it, a symmetrical pattern), when I wrote 'In what appealing and alluring shapes falsehood may have crept into the very heart of his intellectual sincerity, it is not my purpose to enquire'. But it *should* have been my purpose to do so, and I should be committing precisely this sin of idolatry were I to continue to take shelter behind this essentially Ruskinian formula of respect. It is not that I undervalue that same virtue of respect: there can never be love where there is not respect. But it must never, when love has ceased, be used as a substitute for it and employed with the object of making it possible for us to believe uncritically, or to express admiration merely on the word of another. Ruskin would have been the first to approve my determination not to ascribe infallibility to his words, since he himself refused infallibility even to the Scriptures. 'There is no possibility of attaching the idea of infallible truth to any form of human language', he says (*The Bible of Amiens*, III, 3, 49). But the attitude of 'reverence' which thinks it insolent to 'illuminate a mystery', appealed to him.

And now, I would have done with this question of idolatry. But, that there may be no misunderstanding between my readers and myself on the matter, I will further illustrate my argument by reference to one of the most justly celebrated of my contemporaries (a man as different from Ruskin as he well could be!), who shows this same fault, not so much in his work as in his conversation, where it is pushed to such an extreme that we find it easier to recognise than by using a magnifying glass, as we have been doing in the case of Ruskin. It comes out in him when, with an air of distress, he sets himself to speak—adorably, precisely—of idolatry. Any 'imitation' of either his words or his manner, must seem inevitably crude to those who have heard him, because from any such attempt at reproduction the element of charm would be missing.<sup>1</sup> But they will know

<sup>2</sup> I have not been able to identify this 'contemporary'. (*Translator*)



what I have in mind, whom it is that I take as an illustration of my theme, when I say that he is in the habit of recognising with admiring wonder, in the silks draping a tragic actress (or in the dress worn by a friend), the very tissue displayed by Gustave Moreau in his *Death* and in his *Death and the Young Man*. 'The very robe, the very same way of doing the hair, as might have been seen on the Princesse de Cadignan when she saw d'Arthez for the first time.' Gazing at the draperies of the tragic actress, or at the dress of the woman of fashion, and moved by the impact of a splendid memory, he exclaims: 'How exquisite!'—not because the stuff itself is particularly exquisite, but because it is the stuff painted by Moreau or described by Balzac, and so, for ever sacred—to idolaters. On the walls of his own room you will find peculiar stiff-leaved flowers set in vases painted by some of his artist friends, because they are the flowers carved on the statue of the Magdalen at Vézelay. Objects that once belonged to Baudelaire, to Michelet, to Hugo, he surrounds with an aura of religious respect. I am too keenly, too almost intoxicatingly, aware of the delights which it is in the power of such super-subtle whims to bestow, where a peculiar form of pleasure guides and inspires in us a sense of idolatry, to wish, in however small a degree, to cavil at such things. But, even while I feel that pleasure, I cannot help wondering whether this incomparable talker—and the listener who lets himself be carried away—is not also guilty of this sin of insincerity; whether, because a flower (the Passion Flower) is marked with the implements of the Crucifixion, it is therefore sacrilegious to give it to persons who are not Christians; or whether the fact that a certain house was once lived in by Balzac (though nothing now remains in it to remind us of him) adds, in truth, to its beauty. Is there any reason, other than the wish to pay an æsthetic compliment, why we should attach any special value to a woman just because she is called Bathilde—like the heroine of *Lucien Leuwen*?

The toilette of Madame de Cadignan is a ravishing invention of Balzac's, because it gives us an idea of Madame de Cadignan's taste, and lets us see just what impression she



wished to produce on d'Arthez, and on one of two of her 'very specials'. But take from it the intelligence which is one of her attributes, and it becomes a mere sign, stripped of all significance; in other words, nothing at all. To continue to adore it to the extent of going into raptures when one happens to see it on a woman's back in real life, is nothing less than sheer idolatry. It is the favourite sin of artists, and there are few who have not succumbed to it. *Felix Culpa!*—we are tempted to say, when we realise how fruitful it has been for them in charming inventions. But we should at least demand that they do not succumb to it without a struggle. There is in nature no single form, however beautiful, which is of value, in itself, unless it serve to make visible a scrap of the eternal beauty—not even the apple blossom, not even the pink hawthorn. My love for both these things is infinite; and the sufferings to which I am exposed (hay fever) whenever I am near them, enable me, each Spring, to give such proof of my devotion as is not within the reach of all. But even where they are concerned—and they have little or no connection with literary tradition, are not even 'the flower we see in some picture by Tintoretto', as Ruskin might say, or in a drawing by Leonardo, as this contemporary of ours would point out (for he has revealed to us, among other things of which everyone now talks, though no one looked at them before he drew attention to their beauties—the drawings in the Accademia at Venice)—I shall always be careful not to indulge in an exclusive cult, which would always be connected with something in them quite different from the pleasure they afford, would be a cult in whose name, and as the result of a kind of egotistical introversion, we might come to regard them as 'our' blossoms, might take steps to pay them special honour by adorning our walls with works of art in which they might happen to appear. No, I refuse to think a picture more beautiful because the artist has put a hawthorn bush in the foreground. I wish to retain my sincerity: and I know that the beauty of a picture does not depend upon the objects represented in it. I shall not collect artistic treatments of the hawthorn. I do not *venerate* the



hawthorn: I go to see it and to inhale its scent.

I have permitted myself this brief incursion—it is not an attack—into the field of modern literature, because it seems to me that the characteristics of idolatry, which are merely potential in Ruskin, may be more easily comprehended by the reader in an enlarged version, and especially when, as in the case I have quoted, they take a form so very different. In any case, I beg my contemporary, should he happen to recognise himself in this very crude sketch, to believe that it has been made without malice, and that it was only made at all because I felt that I had to analyse, as closely as possible, my own sense of insincerity, if I was, with a clear conscience, to register this grievance against Ruskin, and to put my finger on the one reservation I would make in my boundless admiration for him. Not only is there nothing dishonouring in a difference of opinion with Ruskin, but I could pay no greater compliment to this contemporary than to bring against him the same charge as I have brought against Ruskin. I almost regret my discretion in leaving him unnamed. For when one is admitted into Ruskin's presence, even if it be only in the posture of a donor, of one sustaining on his back the weight of his work, and helping others to appreciate it more intelligently, one is conscious not of the drudgery such labour may entail, but of the honour it bestows. To go back to Ruskin. Where this idolatry is concerned, and the faintly artificial element which it introduces into our literary pleasure, however lively that may be, I have to delve deeply into myself in order to discover its trace, and to study its nature, so habituated have I become, by this time, to Ruskin's mind. But I think it must often have shocked me, when first I began to love his books, and before I gradually came to shut my eyes to their defects, as one always does when one loves. The love of human beings sometimes begins in vileness, and later grows pure. A man, let us say, gets to know a woman because she may be able to help him to reach some objective which, intrinsically, has nothing to do with her. Then, as a result of knowing her, he grows to love her for herself, and unquestioningly sacrifices, in the interest of that love, the



## A MASSACRE OF CHURCHES

very thing for the possession of which he meant to use her as a means. There was, at first, in my love for Ruskin's books some alloy of self-interest; what was in my mind was the intellectual benefit I should derive from them. But as soon as I started to read him, I began to feel the power and the charm that emerged from his pages. Deliberately, I set myself not to resist it, to read more or less uncritically, because I felt that if, in days to come, the delight of Ruskin's thought should colour for me everything that it had touched; if, in a word, I should fall in love with his mind, then I should find the universe enriched in ways of which, till then, I had known nothing, should have my eyes opened to the wealth of beauty that lies in Gothic cathedrals, and in many English and Italian pictures which, as yet, had not woken in me that sense of desire without which no real knowledge can ever exist. For Ruskin's thought is not like, say, Emerson's; not, I mean, something that can be wholly contained within the covers of a book. In other words, it is not an abstraction, not an austere 'sign'. The object to which thought such as Ruskin's is applied, from which it is inseparable, is never immaterial. It is something which is to be found in many places scattered up and down the earth. To seek it, one must go where it is, to Pisa, to Florence, to Venice, to the National Gallery, to Rouen, to Amiens, to the mountains of Switzerland. Such thought, which has an object other than itself, which finds its realisation in the dimensions of space, which is no longer infinite and free, but is limited and confined, which is incarnate in carved marble, in mountain snows, in portraits, is, perhaps, less divine than thought in its pure essence. But it gives a greater beauty to the world, or, at least, to certain special, certain defined objects in the world, because it has laid its hand upon them, has initiated us into their secrets by compelling us, in our search for understanding, to love them.

And that is precisely what happened in my case. I suddenly saw the universe as something of infinite value. My admiration for Ruskin gave such high importance to the objects he had made me love, that they seemed charged with a greater value



even than life itself. It was at a time when I believed, quite literally, that my days were numbered. I went to Venice that I might, before I died, approach, touch, see incarnate, in Palaces crumbling yet still standing and flushed with pink, Ruskin's ideas on the domestic architecture of the Middle Ages. What possible importance, what possible reality could there be for someone about to leave this world, in a city so individual, so localised in time, so particularised in space as Venice: and how could theories about domestic architecture, which I might study there and verify by reference to actual examples—how could such things conceivably belong to the great body of those truths which 'have power over death, and prevent us from fearing, almost make us love, it'?<sup>1</sup> It is the peculiar power of genius to make us love a beauty, which we feel to be more real than ourselves, in things that, to other eyes, are no less limited, no less perishable than are we. The saying of the poet that 'Beauty I'll see, instructed by your eyes', is not very true if what he is thinking of are only his lady's eyes. In a certain sense, love, leaving out of account the magnificent triumphs we can set to its account even in this same world of poetry, does take the poetry out of nature. For the lover, the earth is no more than a 'carpet' for his mistress, 'where the sweet feet of children tread'; nature is but her temple. Love, which discovers for us so many profound psychological truths, closes our hearts to the poetry of nature,<sup>2</sup> because it induces in us that egotistical mood (love may be the highest rung on the ladder of egotisms, but it remains egotistic for all that) into which poetical sentiment intrudes with difficulty. The admiration that we feel for a thought, on the other hand, brings beauty to flower at each step we take, because at each step it wakes in us a desire for it. Inferior minds believe, as a rule, that to surrender oneself entirely to the books one loves, means that

<sup>1</sup> Renan

<sup>2</sup> I was at first a little uneasy about the justice of this theory, but my doubts were soon dispelled by the only thing that can verify a mental process. I accidentally made the acquaintance of a great intelligence. Almost exactly at the moment when I was writing this



our power of judgment must give up some part of its independence. 'Why bother about what Ruskin felt: feel for yourself.' This sort of opinion rests upon a psychological error, as all will agree who, having accepted a mental discipline, become aware that their powers of thought and feeling are infinitely increased, and their critical sense never paralysed. What it comes to is that we are then in a state of Grace, as a result of which our faculties, and, among them, our ability to criticise, are enhanced. Thus, a voluntary servitude of such a kind is really the beginning of liberty. There is no better way of becoming conscious of what one feels oneself than to try to re-create in one's own mind the feelings of a master. For the deep-searching effort brings our thought, as well as his, into the light of day. We are free agents in life, but only if we work to an end. The sophistical theory that liberty means indifference has long been exploded. It is a similar, and simple-minded, sophism that holds in its toils those writers (though they do not realise it) who are forever trying to make their minds a blank, thinking, thereby,

passage, the verse which I give below, by the Comtesse de Noailles, appeared in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. It will at once be apparent that, to echo Monsieur Barrès at Combours, I had 'trodden in the footsteps of genius':

*Enfants, regardez bien toutes les plaines rondes;  
La capucine avec ses abeilles autour;  
Regardez bien l'étang, les champs, avant l'amour;  
Car, après, l'on ne voit plus jamais rien du monde.  
Après, l'on ne voit plus que son cœur devant soi;  
On ne voit plus qu'un peu de flamme sur la route;  
On n'entend rien, on ne sait rien, et l'on écoute  
Les pieds du triste amour qui court ou qui s'asseyoit.*

The following is a rough translation of these lines:

Look, children, well upon the spreading plain;  
The flowers assailed by all the bumbling bees;  
Look on the lake, the fields, for he who sees,  
When love has come, will never see again.  
For afterwards, he sees naught but his heart,  
A little flame that flickers on his way;  
Hears nothing, nothing knows, but love astray  
On running feet, or sitting there apart.  
(Translator)



to rid themselves of all external influences, and so strengthen their own personalities. Actually, the only time at which we can really be said to put forth the full power of our minds is when we do not suppose that we are showing a fine independence, when we are not making an arbitrary choice of the end to be pursued. The novelist's 'subject', the poet's 'vision', the philosopher's 'truth', are imposed by what seems almost a necessity by something which is, so to speak, external to their thought. It is by setting himself to *render* his vision, to approach the truth thus shown him, that the artist becomes most truly himself.

But in speaking of this passion, at first slightly artificial, though later deeply felt, which I had for Ruskin's thought, I have to call memory to my aid: a memory that can recall nothing but facts, and 'of the buried past can naught recall'. It is only when certain periods of our life have gone for ever, when, even at such times as we feel power and liberty have been given to us, we realise that the gates of the past are for ever bolted; it is when we find it impossible to put ourselves back, even for a moment, into the state of mind which for so long was our daily companion; it is then only, that we refuse to believe that these things have gone irrecoverably. We can sing the old song no longer because we have misunderstood the wise warning uttered by Goethe, that poetry can be made only from what we still feel. But if we cannot fan to life the flames of the past, we wish, at least, to gather up its ashes. In the absence of a resurrection which we cannot compass by means of the frozen memory we have retained of things dead and gone—the memory which says '*that* is what you were', without permitting us to become it once again; which gives us news of a lost paradise instead of restoring it to us in recollection—we do, at least, strive to describe it, to reconstitute it, by the exercise of scientific reasoning. It is when Ruskin has gone from us that we translate his books and try to fix in a portrait which is a mere shadow of reality, the nature of his thought. The living accents of my faith and of my love you cannot hear, but can only catch a glimpse of that piety which, cold and furtive, is engaged, like the Theban virgin, in repairing a tomb.



## DEATH COMES TO THE CATHEDRALS<sup>1</sup>

Let us assume for a moment that Catholicism has been dead for centuries, and all tradition of its rites wholly forgotten. Only the cathedrals remain, dumb, alienated from their purpose, monuments, now unintelligible, of an unremembered creed. One day a number of archæologists decide to reconstruct the ceremonies once held in them, the very ceremonies for which they were built, and without which they can be nothing but a dead letter. Artists, indulging in the sweet dream of giving back a momentary life to these great, stranded vessels, try to make of them, for one brief hour, the theatres of that mysterious

<sup>1</sup> This is the title of an essay which I once published in the *Figaro*, with the object of combatting one of the clauses in the Act which set the seal upon the Separation of Church and State. It was a mediocre affair, and I reprint here only a short extract from it, to show how, even after the shortest of intervals, words change their meanings; and how, in the twists and turns of life, we can no more foresee the future of nations than we can of individuals. When I spoke of death coming to the cathedrals, I feared that France was to be transformed into a beach strewn with vast heaps of chiselled shells, emptied of the life that once filled them, and no longer bringing to the listening ear the sounds that formerly they held; mere museum-pieces, frozen and dead. Ten years have passed. Death has come to the fabric of our Cathedrals at the hands of the German armies, but not to their spirit as the result of the activities of an anti-clerical Chamber which now stands solidly united with our patriot bishops.



drama which was formerly played out within their walls in a mist of perfume and a drone of chants; undertake, in a word, to do for the Mass and for the cathedrals what the *cognoscenti* of the South have done for the theatre at Orange and for the Tragedies of the ancient world. I am quite sure that the Government would be only too glad to subsidise such an effort. What it has done for Roman ruins it could not fail to do for France's own monuments, for those cathedrals which are the noblest and most original expression of the French genius.

See them, then, these men of learning, busying themselves to discover the vanished significance of our cathedral churches. Meaning comes back to carving and to painted windows: mystery, incense-sweet, hangs like a cloud within the temple aisles, and the building takes up once again its ancient song. The Government is well advised to grant its subsidy; grants it, indeed, with better reason than in the case of Orange, of the Opéra and of the Opéra-Comique, for this resurrection of catholic ceremonies is packed with interest—historic, social, plastic, musical. These ceremonies are rich with beauties which Wagner alone has come near to rivalling, in *Parsival*, and only then, because he took them as his models.

Car-loads of snobs descend upon the Holy City (whether it be Amiens, Chartres, Bourges, Laon, Rheims, Beauvais, Rouen or Paris), and, once a year, experience that thrill which formerly they sought at Bayreuth or at Orange, sampling a work of art within the frame that originally was made to contain it. But alas!—as at Orange, they can never be anything but sight-seers and *dilettanti*. Do what they may, the soul to which once this ritual spoke is theirs no longer. It matters not that the artists engaged to sing the chants, the actors brought to play the priests, have been ably coached, have absorbed the spirit of their parts. In spite of all they may do, we cannot help feeling how much more beautiful the festivals must have been when real priests said the Office, not with the object of giving to sophisticated onlookers an idea of what it was all like, but because they believed in the virtue of their rites as truly as did the artists who carved the Last Judgment in the tympanum



of the porch, or set the lives of the saints in the stained glass of the apse. What higher, truer note must all have struck when the assembled people made their response to the priest, and bowed when the bell sounded for the Elevation, not with the detachment of actors in a revival, but because they, too, like their priest, like the man who had carved the stone, had faith.

Such would be our feeling if the catholic religion had died. But it still lives, and if we would know what a thirteenth century cathedral was really like when it was a living entity in the full exercise of its function, there is no need for us to have recourse to the reconstructions of a frozen antiquarianism. We have but to enter, at no matter what hour, when the Office is being celebrated. The miming, the singing and the chants are not dependent on the skill of actors. It is the ministers of the Faith who there officiate, not for art's sake but for religion's, and, therefore, more artistically. No 'extras' could give a greater sense of reality, of sincerity, to the scene, because it is the members of the congregation who play the extras here, though such a thought never enters their heads. It may be said that, thanks to the continuity of ritual in the Catholic Church, and thanks to the unshaken hold of Catholic faith on the hearts of the French people, the cathedrals are not only the loveliest monuments of our national art, but are the only ones that still have life in them, pressed down and flowing over, the only ones that still perform the functions for which, originally, they were made.

But the breach of the French Government with Rome seems likely, in no short time, to bring up for discussion, and probable adoption, a projected Act, the effect of which must be that, at the end of five years, our churches may, and often will, be alienated from their true purpose. Not only will no subsidy be forthcoming for the celebration of the rites, but the very fabrics will be transformed in what ever way may seem fit to those in authority, to serve the purposes of museums, lecture-halls and casinos.

When the sacrifice of the body and blood of Christ shall no longer be celebrated in our churches, the life will have gone



out of them. The Catholic Liturgy is one with the architecture and the carvings of our cathedrals, because these things derive from the self-same symbolism. I have shown, in a previous essay, that there is scarcely a scrap of sculpture in a cathedral church, no matter how secondary in importance it may seem, which has not its symbolic value.

The same is true of its ceremonies. Let me quote the analysis of the first part of the Office for Easter Saturday, as it is given by Monsieur Emile Mâle in his admirable *l'Art Religieux aux XIII<sup>me</sup> Siècle*. He takes as his authority Guillaume Durand's *Rational des Divines Offices*.

The day begins with the extinction of every lamp in the church to show that the ancient Law, which once gave light to the world, has been abrogated.

Next, the celebrant blesses the new flames which symbolise the new Dispensation, causing them to leap from the stone walls, as a reminder that, in the words of St Paul, Jesus Christ is the headstone of the corner of the world. Then, the Bishop and the Deacon move towards the choir and stop before the pascal candle.

This candle, as Guillaume Durand tells us, is a triple symbol. Extinguished, it stands for the column of cloud which led the Jews by day, for the ancient Law, and for the body of Jesus Christ. Lit, it symbolises the column of fire which Israel saw in the darkness, the new Law, and the glorified body of Jesus Christ, risen. The Deacon makes allusion to this triple meaning by reciting in front of the candle the formula of the *Exultet*.

But he lays especial emphasis upon the resemblance between the candle and the body of Jesus Christ. He recalls that the immaculate wax is the product of the bee, an insect at once chaste and fruitful, like the Blessed Virgin who brought the Saviour into the world. To give visual form to this likeness of the wax to the divine body, he sticks into it five grains of incense, which are reminders of the five wounds of Christ and of the perfumes bought



by the holy women for the embalming of His body. Finally, he lights the candle from the newly kindled flame, and all the lamps in the church are lit, as a sign that the new Law has been spread throughout the world.

But this, it will be said, is an exceptional Feast-Day. In answer to that objection, let me give an interpretation of the daily celebration of the Mass. It will be seen that it is no less symbolic.

The sad and solemn chant of the *Introit* begins the Office. It tells of the patient waiting of the patriarchs and the prophets. The choral accompaniment of the priests is the choir of the saints of the ancient Dispensation, sighing for the coming of the Messiah whom they shall not see. Then the Bishop enters, imaging the figure of the living Christ. His coming symbolises the coming of the Saviour, for which the nations have waited. On the occasion of the major feasts seven candles are carried before him, as a reminder that, in the words of the Prophet, the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit rest upon the head of the Son of God. He moves forward beneath a triumphal canopy whose four bearers symbolise the four Evangelists. He has with him two acolytes, one on his right, one on his left, who represent Moses and Elias who were shown with Christ at the Transfiguration on Mount Tabor. Their presence signifies that Jesus had with Him the authority of the Law and the Prophets.

The Bishop takes his place upon his throne and sits there silent. He seems to be taking no part in the first stage of the ceremony. His attitude *means* something. He recalls to us by his silence the fact that the first years in the life of Jesus Christ were passed in obscurity and reflection. The Sub-Deacon, on the other hand, goes to the desk, and, turning to his right hand reads the Epistle in a loud voice. In this we are to see the first act in the drama of the Redemption.

The reading of the Epistle is the preaching of St John the Baptist in the wilderness. He speaks before the Saviour has



begun to make His voice heard, but he speaks only to the Jews. The Sub-Deacon, symbol of the Forerunner, turns towards the North, which is the side of the Ancient Law. When he has finished reading, he bows before the Bishop, as the Forerunner humbled himself at the feet of Jesus Christ.

The chanting of the *Gradual*, which follows the reading of the Epistle, still refers to the mission of St John the Baptist, and symbolises the call to repentance which he addressed to the Jews on the eve of the New Dispensation.

Then, the celebrant reads the Gospel. This is a solemn moment, for it marks the beginning of the Messiah's active life, when His word is heard for the first time in the world. The reading of the Gospel stands for His preaching.

The Creed follows the Gospel, as Faith follows the declaration of the Truth. Its twelve articles have reference to the vocation of the Twelve Apostles.

'The very robes which the priest wears at the Altar', continues Monsieur Mâle, 'and the objects which he uses in the celebration are no less symbolic.' The *Chasuble*, which is put on over the other vestments, is Charity, which is superior to all the precepts of the Law, and is itself the supreme Law. The *Stole* which the priest places round his neck, is the light yoke of the Lord, and because it is written that every Christian shall love this yoke the priest kisses the stole when he puts it on and takes it off. The Bishop's two-pointed *Mitre* symbolises the knowledge he must have of both the Old and the New Testament. Two ribbons are attached to it, as a reminder that the Scriptures must be interpreted according to the letter and according to the Spirit. The *Bell* is the voice of the preacher. The frame from which it is suspended is an image of the Cross. The cord, woven of three strands, signifies the triple meaning of the Scriptures, which are to be interpreted in three senses—historical, allegorical and moral. When the priest takes hold of the cord to ring the bell he expresses symbolically the supreme truth that the knowledge of the Scriptures must issue in action.

Thus everything, down to the least gesture made by the



priest, down to the very Stole he wears, is part of a symbolic harmony, which helps to make up the profound feeling that fills the whole cathedral.

No comparable spectacle, no such mirror of knowledge, spirit and history has ever been offered to the eyes and to the understanding of men. . . The same symbolism extends even to the music which fills the vast hollow of the building, for its seven Gregorian tones image the seven theological virtues and the seven ages of the world. It is no exaggeration to say that a performance of Wagner at Bayreuth (and still more, of a piece by Emile Augier or Dumas in a subsidised theatre) is a trifling thing compared with High Mass in Chartres Cathedral.

It need scarcely be pointed out that those only who have studied the religious art of the Middle Ages are capable of completely analysing the beauty of such a spectacle. All the more reason, therefore, that the State should see to it that the continuity is not broken. It supports the teaching of the Collège de France, which reaches only a small number of persons, and must seem cold and lifeless when set beside the complete and close-knit symbolism of the Resurrection in the High Mass as celebrated in a cathedral. Compared with such symphonies, the performances given in all our other subsidised theatres are but literary trivia. But let me hasten to add that those who can read the symbolism of the Middle Ages like an open book are not the only people for whom the living cathedral, that is to say the carved and coloured building, with its echoing music, provides the greatest of all spectacles. A man may have a feeling for music even if he knows nothing of harmony. I am aware that Ruskin, explaining the spiritual meaning that determines the arrangement of the chapels in the apse of a cathedral, says: 'You will never be able to feel the charm of architectural forms if you are not in sympathy with the thought from which they have emerged.' It is no less true, however, as we all of us know, that a man wholly ignorant of these things, a simple dreamer, may enter a cathedral without trying in any way to understand, content to let his emotions take charge, and get from what he sees and hears an impression,



which, though it will doubtless be less clear-cut, may be no less powerful. As literary evidence of this state of mind, which is very different, to be sure, from that of the scholar of whom I have been speaking, which enables a man to walk about a cathedral, as in some 'forest of symbols which gaze upon him with familiar eyes', and still, when the Office is being said, feel powerful though vague emotions, let me quote a beautiful passage from Renan which he entitles *The Double Prayer*.

One of the loveliest religious spectacles that one can witness nowadays [and which one will soon be able to witness no longer, should the Chamber pass the Act in question] is to be found at nightfall in the cathedral of Quimper. When darkness fills the aisles of the huge building, the faithful of both sexes assemble in the nave and sing the Evening Prayer in the Breton tongue to a simple and appealing rhythm. The only light comes from two or three lamps. On one side are the men, standing; on the other, the kneeling women, with their white coifs, produce the effect of a motionless sea. The two sections chant alternately, and the phrase begun by one is completed by the other. What they are singing is very beautiful. When I hear it I feel that, with a very few changes, it might be adapted to any state of mind to be found in the human race. Especially does it set me dreaming of a form of prayer which, with certain variations, might suit equally, both men and women.

Between this state of day-dreaming, which is not without its charm, and the more self-conscious pleasure of the 'connoisseur' in matters of religious art, there are many degrees. Let me, for instance, refresh your memory by quoting what Gustave Flaubert says when describing, though with the intention of interpreting it in a modern sense, one of the most beautiful parts of the Catholic liturgy.

The priest dipped his thumb in the sacred oil, and started



to anoint her: first upon the eyes . . . on the nostrils that had been greedy of warm breezes and the heady scents of love . . . on her hands, so avid of soft stuffs . . . and, lastly, on her feet which had once moved swiftly when she had hastened to the satisfaction of desire, and now would never move again.

I said just now that nearly all the images in a cathedral church are symbolic. But some are not: those, I mean, of folk who, having contributed their pence to the decoration of the fabric, have wished to keep for themselves a place there for all time, so that they may, from some upper niche, from the embrasure of some window, follow silently the sacred Office, and share soundlessly in the prayers, *in sæcula sæculorum*. The very oxen of Laon, who, with Christian humility, had dragged to the top of the hill on which the cathedral stands, the materials destined for its building, were rewarded by the architect by having their statues set at the foot of the towers, where you may see them still, lifting their horns in the stagnant heat of the sun and amid the jangle of bells, there, above the vast and sacred arch, dreaming the dreams that speed forth above the plains of France. They may, by this time, have been destroyed: if not, what fields have they not seen where, with each return of Spring grow not flowers but graves? Beasts, they were placed outside the building, emerging, as it were, from some vast Noah's Ark left stranded on this Mount of Ararat above a sea of blood. For men a greater favour was reserved.

Theirs was the privilege to penetrate within the church and take the places that would still belong to them, even after death, whence they could still, as in their lives, follow the divine sacrifice, whether, leaning from their marble sepulchres they lie with heads just turning to where the Epistle or the Gospel lesson is read each day, able to see and feel, as in the church of Brou, the constricting tracery, about their carven names, of emblematic flowers interwoven with the sacred monogram, or sometimes retaining, even in death, as at Dijon,



the glowing colours of life, in painted windows set with all the glory of their blazoned robes, purple, and lapis and the purest azure, which hold the sunlight captive, catching its fire and filling its fragile beams with radiance, and then, on a sudden, giving them release, setting them to wander with aimless glory through all the spaces of the nave now radiant with their tints. Astray, and palpably unreal, with naught to occupy them, they still are donors, and because of that have merited the guerdon of a prayer in perpetuity. It is their wish that the Holy Spirit, each time that He descends, should recognise His own. It is not only kings and princes who there display the insignia of their rank, the crown, the Order of the Golden Fleece. Moneychangers, too, are openly displayed, checking accounts, merchants selling furs (see in Monsieur Mâle's book the reproductions of these two windows), butchers slaughtering, knights in heraldic surcoats, craftsmen carving a pillar's capital. From their windows in Chartres and Tours and Sens, in Bourges, Auxerre and Clermont, in Toulouse and in Troyes, coopers, furriers, grocers, pilgrims, ploughmen, armourers, weavers, carvers of stone, butchers, basket-makers, cobblers, money-changers—there, within hearing of the Sacred Office, no longer will they listen to the Mass (if this Act becomes law) though for that purpose did they give to the building of the church their prized and hoarded wealth. No longer will the dead govern the living. But the forgetful living will have ceased to carry out the wishes of the dead.



## DAYS OF READING 1<sup>1</sup>

NO days, perhaps, of all our childhood are ever so fully lived as those that we had regarded as not being lived at all: days spent wholly with a favourite book. Everything that seemed to fill them full for others we pushed aside, because it stood between us and the pleasures of the Gods: the game to which we might be summoned by a friend just as we had reached the most exciting part; the intrusive bee or the troublesome ray of sunlight that forced us to look up from the page or to change our seat; the 'snack' we had been made to bring, but had left untasted by us on the bench, while overhead the sun shone with diminished heat in the blue sky; dinner, which drew us back to the house, though our thoughts, while we ate, were wholly of the moment when, the meal at long last ended, we should be free to go upstairs, there to finish the interrupted chapter. All these things which figure in our memories only as having been obstacles to reading, have really sunk so deep and left so sweet a trace (much more precious, so we have come to think, than what we then were reading with such passion) that if now we should happen to turn the pages of those ancient books, they would be for us nothing but a calendar of days long past, in which we hope to see reflected the houses and the ponds that are no more.

There must be many who, as I do, remember those moments spent with books at times of holiday that now are hidden

<sup>1</sup> The following essay contains most of what I wrote to serve as an Introduction to my translation of *Sesame and Lilies*. It is here reprinted by generous permission of Monsieur Alfred Vallette. It was dedicated to the Princesse Alexandre de Caraman-Chimay as a token of an admiration and a devotion that the passage of twenty years has not weakened.



beneath successive memories of all those other times, so quiet, so undisturbed, which made a sanctuary for reading.

In the mornings, when I came in from the park, and the others had gone out for a walk, I would slip into the dining room where, till the still distant hour of luncheon, none would intrude save old Felicia, who made no sound to speak of, and where my only companions, careful, all of them, not to disturb my reading, would be the painted plates hung on the walls, the almanack with yesterday's date freshly torn off, the clock and the fire which spoke a language that demanded no response, since the sounds they uttered were devoid of meaning, and, unlike human talk, offered no substitute for the words upon the printed page. I would perch myself upon a chair drawn close to the little fire of twigs, on which, when luncheon came, my uncle, an early riser and passionate gardener, would comment, saying: 'That's a good sight: a bit of fire is very pleasant. I don't mind telling you it was pretty cold in the kitchen garden at six o'clock this morning! Who'd ever think that next week will be Easter!' But luncheon, also, would put an end to reading. Still, there were two good hours ahead. Now and again I could hear the sound of water gushing from the pump. At such times I would raise my eyes and look to where, through the closed window, I could see it close beside the garden's only path which ran between the beds of pansies edged with bricks and china tiles, pansies picked, it seemed, in the fields of a sky too lovely to be true, the multicoloured sky which was like a reflection from the painted windows of the church which I could sometimes glimpse among the village roofs, against a sombre sky that showed before a storm, or, too late, in the evening, when the light was fading. Unfortunately, the cook always came, long before luncheon, to lay the table. If only she had done her work in silence! But she thought it her duty to say: 'You can't be comfortable like that: wouldn't you like me to move the table?' And, merely in order to say, 'No, thank you very much', I had to stop what I was at, and summon from afar my voice which, silently and to myself, was forming the words spread out before my eyes. I had



to stop and make it audible, if only to say, 'No, thank you very much', had to make it seem alive, to give it that intonation of response which it had lost. Time passed. Sometimes, long before the hour of luncheon, the room would be gradually invaded by those who, feeling tired, had cut short their walk, and gone round 'by Méréglise', or by those who, having 'letters to write', had not been out at all. Admittedly, they said: 'Don't let me disturb you', but straightway would draw close in to the fire, and remark, with eyes upon the clock, that luncheon would be welcome. A particular deference was always shown to anyone, man or woman, who had 'letters to write'. 'Got through your correspondence?' a voice would ask, and, in the smile that went with it, there would be an air of respect and mystery, of knowingness and careful tact, as though the 'correspondence' had held State secrets, or had had to do with matters of prerogative, good fortune, or the trials of sickness. Some, without waiting for the meal to begin, would take their accustomed seats at once about the table. That was the worst of all, for it would have the horrible effect of making late arrivals think that noon had struck, and say, too soon, to my parents the fatal words: 'Time to shut up books: luncheon's just coming in.' Everything would be ready, and the table laid. All that was missing was what came only at the meal's end, the glass contraption in which my uncle, who had views on cooking and on gardening, would with his own hands, make the coffee: a thing of complex tubes, for all the world like some engine in a laboratory, which smelled delicious, and was such fun to watch, when suddenly the liquid gushed into the dome of glass, leaving on its sides a brown deposit rich with perfume: and the cream and the strawberries which the same uncle always mixed in proportions that never varied, careful to achieve the precise degree of pink, which he contrived with the experience of a colourist and the divination of a glutton. How long I found that meal! My great-aunt did no more than taste the dishes, so that she might be in a position to give her opinion with an air of gentleness that endured, but would not bow to, contradiction. Where a novel was concerned, or poetry—



matters about which she really knew a great deal—she always, with true womanly humility, yielded to others more competent than herself. Those, she thought, were matters in which whim was paramount, in which mere personal taste could not establish the criteria of truth. But about those things of which she had learned the rules and principles from her mother—the confection of certain dishes, the right way of playing Beethoven Sonatas, the duties of a hostess—she was convinced that she knew best, and could gauge precisely the degree in which others came up to, or fell short of, her standards. Her idea of perfection in each of these three activities was almost the same, and consisted in something that might be called simplicity of means, soberness, and charm. She recoiled in horror from the idea of using spices, except when they were absolutely necessary, from any affectation in piano-playing and the abuse of the pedal, from unnatural behaviour or over-much speaking of oneself when one was giving a party. She had only to take a single mouthful, had but to hear one note, had but to look at a card of invitation, to claim at once that she could tell whether she had to do with a good cook, a genuine musician, or a well-brought-up woman. ‘She may have more fingers than I have, but she shows a lack of taste in playing that *andante* with so much emphasis.’ ‘She may be very brilliant, and have many good qualities, but to talk like that of herself, displays a lack of tact.’ ‘I’ve no doubt she knows a great deal about cooking, but she can’t manage beef steak and potatoes.’ Beef steak and potatoes was her test dish, difficult because so simple, a sort of *Sonata Pathétique* of the kitchen, the gastronomic equivalent of the visit of a lady come to enquire about a servant, an errand simple enough in itself, but capable of telling all one needed to know about her tact and upbringing. Such was my grandfather’s<sup>1</sup> pride that he

<sup>1</sup> Much of the form of this essay, as well as most of its substance, was embodied in *Du Côté de Chez Swann*, where, however, the scheme of family relationships was changed. Proust, in revising this single item of his, seems to have been careless or forgetful, because clearly the ‘grandfather’ here comes from the novel, and the true reference would be to the ‘uncle’ just mentioned. (*Translator*)



would have liked every dish to be perfect. But he knew too little about cooking ever to realise when they were spoiled. He was occasionally, though very rarely, prepared to admit that this was so, but his judgments were dictated by pure chance. The reasoned criticisms of my great-aunt, on the other hand, all of which seemed to imply that the cook did not know how to handle this or that recipe, he always seemed to find quite intolerable. Often, in order to avoid an argument with him, my great-aunt, after merely pecking at the food before her, would carefully abstain from giving her opinion, and this, we always knew at once, meant that, if given, it would have been unfavourable. She said nothing, but we could read in her gentle eyes the signs of an unshakeable, a considered, disapproval which had the effect of sending my grandfather into a fury. He would beg her ironically to give her opinion, would grow impatient at her silence, press her with questions, and finally lose his temper: but one had the feeling always that she would rather have been led to the stake than agree with him that there was not enough sugar in the sweet.

As soon as luncheon was finished, I returned at once to my reading. When the weather was at all warm, the members of the company dispersed to their bedrooms, and this gave me the chance to climb, by the narrow little staircase, to my own, from the low window of which—the house having but two storeys, and the upper one being so close to the ground—a child could have jumped into the street. This window I immediately closed, though without being able to avoid a greeting from the cutler opposite who, on the pretext of lowering his awning, came out every day after luncheon to smoke a pipe on his doorstep, and pass the time of day with people in the street who sometimes stopped for a chat.

The theories of William Morris, so frequently applied by Maples and other English decorators, lay it down that no room can be beautiful unless it contain only useful objects, and that useful objects—down to the simplest nail—must never be hidden, but must be left visible. Above the brass bedstead, innocent of all disguise, a few reproductions of masterpieces may be allowed



to hang on the bare walls of these hygienic chambers. Judged by such æsthetic standards, my room was far from beautiful, being full of objects which could have had no conceivable purpose, and merely concealed those that did, thus making it difficult to get at them at all. But it was just because of the things that were there not for my convenience, but had strayed into it, seemingly, for their own pleasure, that I found my room so lovely: the high white curtains that screened the bed and made of it a kind of sanctuary; the pile of silken coverlets, flowered quilts, embroidered counterpanes, and cambric pillow-slips that hid it completely in the day time, so that it looked like an altar festooned and decked with blossom for the Feast of May, and which, at night, before I could lie down, I had to place with infinite precautions on a chair, where they consented to remain till morning; the trinity, beside the bed, of objects, in glass-ware with a pattern worked in blue—a sugar bowl and water jug that matched (this latter alway left empty as soon as I arrived, on strict instructions from my aunt, who feared lest I might ‘spill’ it), a sort of sacred furniture—being almost as inviolable, as precious, as the bottle of orange-water beside them, which I should no more have dreamed of being allowed to profane, or even to use for selfish purposes, than I should the consecrated pyx, though always, before undressing, I looked long and hard, fearing that by some clumsy movement I might overturn them; the little stoles of crochet-work which spread over every armchair back a mantle of white roses—not wholly thornless, it seemed, since whenever, my reading done, I wanted to get up, I always found myself fast caught; the glass bell—beneath which, isolated from all vulgar contacts, the clock prattled away in secret conclave with a few shells from some distant shore, and one old, faded, sentimental flower—a bell so heavy to lift that whenever the clock ran down, no one but the clock-maker would have been so imprudent as to try to wind it up again; the white lace cloth, spread like an altar frontal on the chest of drawers, turning it, with its ornaments, consisting of two vases, an image of the Saviour, and a twig of sanctified box, into a sort of Sacred Table (an impression further stressed



by the presence of a prie-Dieu which was put beside it every day when the room was done, and which was adorned with tassels that always caught in the cracks of the drawers and so completely prevented them from being opened that I could never take out a handkerchief without bringing down Saviour, sacred vases, box twig and all, or without stumbling over the prie-Dieu in an effort to preserve my balance; and, finally, that triple layer of half-curtains in casement-cloth, a larger set in muslin, and one, larger still, of dimity, all as white and gleaming as hawthorn whenever, as often happened, the sun was on them, but really very tiresome by reason of the trouble they gave, and because they *would* slide along their parallel wooden rods, becoming entangled one with another, and all three sets with the window if I happened to want to open or close it, a second being always ready, if I succeeded in freeing the first, to take its place in the joints of the frame which they jammed as efficiently as would have done a genuine branch of hawthorn or the nests of swallows moved by a desire to settle there, so that the apparently simple operation of opening or shutting a casement could never be managed without my calling on the help of one of the servants; all these things, which not only answered none of my needs, but even provided obstacles—though not very serious ones—to their satisfaction, and had clearly not been put there with the intention of being of use to anyone, peopled my room with thoughts that were, in some sort, personal to themselves, with that deliberate air of preference, of wanting to live happily where fate had set them, which one often finds in trees about a clearing, or, on the margins of roads, and between the cracks of ancient walls, in flowers. They filled it with a silent and a varied life, with a mystery that both charmed, and made me feel to some extent, lost. They turned my room into a species of chapel where the sun—when it struck through the small red panes which my uncle had had inserted in the upper part of the windows—painted upon the walls, after first turning the hawthorn-curtains pink, a pattern in colours as strange as though the tiny chapel had really been enclosed within a larger nave set round with



stained glass. The sound of bells echoed within it, because our house was close to the church, to which, on the great Feast Days, the line of little altars in the street linked us with a thoroughfare of flowers, so that the thought would come to me that they must be ringing in our very roof, immediately above the window, whence often I exchanged a greeting with the curé as he passed reading his breviary, with my aunt returning from Vespers, or with the choirboy bringing us a consecrated bun. As to the photographs of Botticelli's *Primavera*, or the cast of the *Femme Inconnue* from the Lille Museum, which, on the walls and chimney-pieces of the Maple rooms, exemplify the concession made by William Morris to useless beauty, I must confess that their place was taken in my room by a kind of engraving representing Prince Eugène, looking threatening and handsome in his dolman. I was amazed to see him, one evening amid a hubbub of locomotives and hailstones, still terrible, still beautiful, on the door of a station buffet, where he served to advertise some special brand of biscuits. I have come to suspect that my grandfather had once received him as a free gift from the generous manufacturer, and had decided to give him a home in my room. But in those days I never dreamed of his real source of origin which I took to be somewhere in the backward and abysm of history, nor imagined that there could be several replicas of one whom I regarded as a person, as a permanent inhabitant of the room which I only shared with him, and would find again whenever I arrived, year after year, looking always the same. It is a long time now since I last saw him, and I don't suppose I shall ever see him again. But, should I ever have the good fortune to do so, I feel certain that he would have much more to tell me than would the *Primavera* of Botticelli. I leave it to people of taste to adorn their dwellings with reproductions of the masterpieces they admire, thus sparing their memories the task of hoarding a precious image, by setting it in a frame of carved and fretted wood. I leave it to people of taste to turn their rooms into mirrors reflecting that taste, filling them only with what they can approve. Personally speaking,



I feel myself alive and capable of thought only in a room that has been created by, and speaks the language of, lives that are profoundly different from my own, of a taste that is the very opposite of mine, where I find nothing of my conscious, personal thought, where my imagination thrives because it has a sense of having been plunged in the not-me. I feel happy only when I set foot—in some Avenue de la Gare, on a quay-side, or Place de l'Eglise—in one of those provincial hotels, all long, cold corridors, where the wind from outside wages a successful battle with the radiators, where a large-scale map of the Department is still the only ornament on the walls, where each sound serves but to make the silence more apparent by disturbing it, where the rooms have a closed and stuffy smell which the open air can lave but never efface, and which I sniff and sniff again so that it may impregnate my imagination which so loves it, using it as a clue in an attempt to re-create all that it contains of thoughts and memories; where, of an evening, when I open the door of my room, I feel myself intruding upon the diluted life that fills the house, taking it boldly by the hand; when, shutting the door, I move to table or to window; when I sit in a sort of free promiscuity with that life on the sofa which has been 'carried out' by the local upholsterer in what he thinks to be Parisian taste; where, at every turn, I can touch its bare bones, eager to feel the tiny thrill which comes when I take the liberty of laying out my own possessions, and playing the master in a room filled to the brim with other people's personalities, so that it retains, even to the shape of the fire-irons and the pattern of the curtains, the imprint of their dreams; when I walk bare-footed on its alien carpet. For at such times I feel that I can shut myself in with this secret life, as I cross the room, trembling in every limb, to shoot the bolt; when I thrust my legs down in the bed, settled at last with the stranger beneath the great white sheets drawn to my chin, while close at hand a church rings out for all the town the sleepless hours of dying men and lovers.

It was never long before my reading was interrupted by the necessity of going to the park, which lay about half a mile



from the village. But as soon as the obligatory games were over, I would cut short the picnic tea which had been brought in baskets and distributed to us children on the grassy river bank where my book lay, though I was strictly forbidden to return, yet awhile, to my reading. A little further on, in certain relatively wild, and rather mysterious, recesses of the park, the river ceased to be a groomed and artificial waterway, covered with swans, and flanked by paths dotted with groups of smiling statuary, and, with here and there, the splash of leaping carp, gathered speed, swirling down past the park wall, till it became a river in the strict geographical sense of the word—a river that must, surely, have a name of its own—growing continually wider (was it really the same stream as that tame companion of swans and statues?) as it flowed between pastures filled with dozing kine where buttercups grew half awash, a species of meadowland made marshy by its waters, linked to the village on one side by a few shapeless ruins popularly supposed to date back to the Middle Ages, and, on the other, merging into little climbing lanes, sweet with dog-rose and with hawthorn brakes, and so into that distant, unknown 'wild' with its scattering of 'foreign'-sounding hamlets. I would leave the others to finish their tea at the near end of the park, in the company of the swans, run uphill through the wilderness until I reached a certain hornbeam tree, and there sit, safe from discovery, my back against a tangle of clipped hazel, looking out on the world around me, on the asparagus plants, the strawberry beds, the pond—where sometimes horses turned and turned, drawing the water up—on the white gate which marked the upper limits of the park, and, far beyond, on the fields of cornflowers and of poppies. In this tree of mine the silence was profound, the risk of being discovered almost nil. My sense of security was rendered sweeter still because I could hear the sound of distant voices calling me in vain, at times coming quite close when their owners climbed a few yards of the grassy bank, looking everywhere for me, and turning back with empty hands. They went, and nothing broke the silence, save, now and again, the golden note of bells which, reaching me across the stretching



countryside, seemed to be ringing from behind the blue of Heaven with news of fleeting time, and, though I was startled by the sweetness of their note, and troubled by the deeper quiet that followed as the echo died away, I could never be sure of the number of the strokes. Far different were those bells from the more thunderous peal which we could hear when we reached the village on our homeward way, drawing near to the church which, when we came close, resumed its tall and rigid bulk, rearing against the blue of dusk its tile-hung cap dotted with rooks, and flinging its spate of sound upon the Square in thanksgiving for 'the fruits of the earth'. To my distant corner of the park the sound of them came weak and sweet, bearing a message, not to me but to all the countryside, to all the villages and to the lonely workers in the fields. They did not even make me raise my head, but passed me by, carrying the time to distant lands, not seeing me, not aware of my existence, never bringing disturbance to my peace.

Sometimes, too, at home, when I had gone to bed—dinner-time long past—the final hours of evening would make a refuge for my reading, but only on those days when I had reached the last chapters of a book, and had only a few pages left. Then, at risk of being punished in the event of my being discovered, and of a sleeplessness which, the book once closed, might last far into the night, I would relight my candle as soon as my parents had gone to their room, while, high above the near-by street, between the cutler's shop and the post office, both wrapped in silence, a crowd of stars shone in the sky, still blue for all its darkness, and, to the left, in the steep little lane that turned and twisted as it climbed, I could feel the watchful presence, black and gigantic, of the church's apse, where the statues never slept, of that simple, yet historic, village church, magical home of the good God, of the consecrated bread, of many-coloured saints, and of the ladies from the near-by great houses, who, on days of Festival, setting the chickens clucking as they crossed the market-place, would come to Mass in their 'spanking' carriages, nor ever fail, on their way home, to pay a visit to the pastry-cook's in the Square



after they had left the porch where the faithful, pushing through the swing-doors, set the rubies of the nave a-scatter—there to buy some of those cakes shaped like towers and protected from the sun by awnings drawn down over the shop window, known as '*manqués*', '*saint-honorés*' and '*génoises*', the sugared, idle smell of which remains for me inextricably mingled with the sound of bells calling to Mass, and the happy air of Sunday.

At last the final page was read; the book was finished. I had to tear my excited eyes away, and check my voice which had been soundlessly following the words, never stopping, except to draw breath in a deep sigh. But my mind had been in a state of tumult for far too long to be easily calmed. Therefore, to give it something else to do, some physical action to control, I got up and started to pace the floor beside my bed, my eyes still fixed upon a point which would have been sought in vain within the room, or even outside it, since it was situated where only the imagination could perceive it, at a distance not measurable in yards or miles, like other distances, and only to be understood by those who have looked into the eyes of people whose thoughts are 'far away'.

What, was the book I had just finished, *only* a book? Those characters to whom I had given so much more of my attention, of my love, than I should ever have done to beings of flesh and blood—not, sometimes, daring to admit how fond I was of them, so that, when my parents, coming on me as I read, smiled to see how deeply moved I was, I would shut the book with assumed indifference or pretended boredom: those characters for whom I had sobbed and caught my breath—I should never see again, nor know what lay in store for them. Already, in a few brief pages, cruelly entitled 'Epilogue', the author had been at pains to 'pack them up' with an indifference that seemed incredible to anyone who knew the interest with which, till then, he had followed their doings. Each hour of their lives had been narrated in detail; and then, suddenly:<sup>1</sup> 'Twenty years after the events just described, a man of great age but erect carriage, might have been seen in the streets of

<sup>1</sup> I admit that a certain use of the imperfect tense (in French)—of



Fougères', etc. The marriage which, through two long volumes, I had been allowed to glimpse only as a delicious possibility, so that I trembled and rejoiced as each obstacle arose and was overcome, was now heard of as an accomplished fact only from the lips of some secondary character—though the reader had never been informed when, precisely, it took place—in that astonishing epilogue, written, it seemed, from the remote fastnesses of Heaven by someone quite indifferent to our earlier passions, who had been substituted for the author. I should so dearly have liked the book to continue, or, if that was impossible, to be told more about all these people, to learn something of their later lives,<sup>1</sup> to spend my own in doing things that should not be

that cruel tense which shows us life as something both ephemeral and passive, which, even while it retraces our actions, strikes them with the unreality of illusion, and destroys them utterly, by relegating them to the past, without, like the perfect, consoling us with a sense of action—remains for me a source of mysterious melancholy. Even today, after thinking for hours quite calmly about death, I have only to open a volume of Sainte-Beuve's *Lundis*, and come, for instance, on the following phrase of Lamartine's (he is speaking of Madame Albany): '*Rien ne rappelait en elle cette époque . . . C'était une petite femme dont la taille un peu affaissée sous son poids avait perdu*', etc . . . to feel myself overwhelmed by a sense of profound depression. In novels, where the author's deliberate intention of causing pain is much more obvious, one stiffens oneself consciously to meet the blow.

<sup>1</sup> Much the same method of reading, though employed rather more indirectly, is possible even in the case of books which are not entirely exercises of the imagination, but are, to some extent, based upon a modicum of historical fact. Balzac, for instance, whose novels are rarely without this kind of alloy, being a mixture of invention and of an actuality which has been too little sublimated, lend themselves occasionally, and without much difficulty, to reading of this sort. He certainly inspired one of the best of such 'historically minded readers', Monsieur Albert Sorel, to write two incomparable essays, one on *Une Ténébreuse Affaire*, the other on *l'Envers de l'Histoire Contemporaine*. Such a method of reading, which gives rise to an enjoyment at once ardent yet sober, seems to be admirably suited to his enquiring intelligence and strong, well-balanced physique—reading, in the course of which a thousand mingled sensations of poetry and contentment dance up from the depths of a healthy temperament, and form about the reader's reverie a mist of pleasure which has the



wholly alien to the love they had inspired in me, but which was now left without occupation; to feel that I had not, for one brief hour, loved in vain characters who, tomorrow, would be no more than names on the forgotten page of a book that had nothing whatever to do with life, and about the value of which I had been so sorely deceived—as I saw now, and as my parents had warned me would be the case, when they dropped a few disdainful words—realising that it was not, as once I had thought it would be, designed to contain the whole of life and destiny, but only to fill a narrow space on the shelves of a lawyer's book-case, between the trivial splendours of the *Journal de Modes Illustré* and the *Géographie d'Eure-et-Loire*.

And here, as I am about to approach *Of King's Treasuries*, I have thought it well, before attempting to show why, in my opinion, reading ought not to play the preponderant part in life which Ruskin ascribes to it in that little book, to exclude from my general criticism those delightful excursions into books which mark our childhood, the recollection of which must hover like a blessing over the memories of each one of us. Doubtless, by the length and the nature of the reflections here printed, I have shown, perhaps to excess, what was in my mind—that their peculiar heritage to us is the setting of times and places in which they were conducted. I have not been able to free myself from the spell they exercise. Meaning to speak of them, it is not of books that I have spoken, because it was not of books that they spoke to me. But perhaps the memories, that, one by one, they called up in my mind, have been awakened, too, in that of my reader, with the result that he may have been led, after loitering awhile in those flowery byways, to recreate in his own imagination the original psychological activity which goes by the name of 'reading', and sweetness and the golden tint of honey. But it is not in connection with semi-historical works that Monsieur Sorel has shown to perfection this art of filling an hour's reading with a host of vigorous and original thoughts. I shall always remember—with a sense of the deepest gratitude—that my essay on *The Bible of Amiens* furnished him with an excuse for some of the most powerful pages that, probably, he has ever written.



with sufficient clarity to make it possible for him now to follow, as in the intimacy of his own thoughts, the few comments which I still have to make.

It is a matter of general knowledge that *Of Kings' Treasuries* is a lecture on the subject of reading which Ruskin delivered in the Town Hall of Rusholme, near Manchester, on the 6th December, 1864, with the object of supporting the creation of a library in the Rusholme Institute. On the 14th December, he followed it with another, *Of Queens' Gardens*—relating to the rôle of women, the object of which was to encourage the founding of a school at Ancoats. All though that year, says Mr Collingwood—in his admirable *Life of John Ruskin*.

he remained at home, except for short necessary and frequent visits to Carlyle, and when, in December, he gave those lectures in Manchester, which, afterwards, as *Sesame and Lilies*, became his most popular work, we can trace his better health of mind and body in the brighter tone of his thought. We can hear the echo of Carlyle's talk in the heroic, aristocratic, Stoic, ideals, and in the insistence on the value of books and free public libraries—Carlyle being the founder of the London Library.

It is my intention here to discuss only the main thesis put forward by Ruskin, without bothering about its historical origins. It can be adequately summed up in these words of Descartes: 'The reading of all good books is like talking with those noble men of past centuries who were their authors.' Ruskin may, perhaps, have been ignorant of this rather dry comment by the French philosopher, but the thought that we find in his lecture is identical with it, though wrapped round in Apollonian gold into which have run the colours of the English fog, until the resultant tone resembles that which glows in the landscapes of his favourite painter.

But granting [he says] that we had both the will and the sense to choose our friends well, how few of us have the power! or, at least, how limited, for most, is the sphere of choice! We cannot know whom we would . . . We



may, by good fortune, obtain a glimpse of a great poet, and hear the sound of his voice; or put a question to a man of science, and be answered good-humouredly. We may intrude ten minutes' talk on a cabinet minister, answered probably with words worse than silence, being deceptive; or snatch, once or twice in our lives at the privilege of throwing a bouquet in the path of a Princess, or arresting the kind glance of a Queen. And yet these momentary chances we covet; and spend our years, and passions, and powers in pursuit of little more than these; while, meantime, there is a society continually open to us, of people who will talk to us as long as we like, whatever our rank or occupation. And this society, because it is so numerous and so gentle, and can be kept waiting round us all day long—kings and statesmen lingering patiently, not to grant audience but to gain it!—in those plainly furnished and narrow ante-rooms, our bookcase shelves—we make no account of that company—perhaps never listen to a word they would say, all day long! . . . You may tell me [continues Ruskin] that we can see the faces of the living men, and it is themselves, and not their sayings, with which we desire to become familiar, etc

—and then, refuting this first objection, and a second, too, he shows that reading is, in very truth, a conversation with men much wiser and more interesting than those whom we may chance to meet around us. I have attempted, in my notes to *Sesame and Lilies*, to show that reading can never be thus equated with conversation with any living man, no matter how wise; that what makes a book and a friend so different, one from another, has nothing whatever to do with the greater or less degree of their wisdom, but with the manner of our communication, reading, as opposed to conversation, consisting, for each one of us, in *receiving* another's thought, while all the time, ourselves, remaining alone, that is to say, continuing to enjoy that intellectual power which comes to us in solitude, and which conversation at once destroys—continuing in a state of mind



which allows us to be inspired, to let the mind work fruitfully upon itself. Had Ruskin drawn the logical conclusion from certain other truths which he states somewhat further on, he would probably have found himself in agreement with me. But, quite clearly, he made no effort to strike to the heart even of the *idea* of the nature of reading. All he wanted to do was to make us realise the value of reading, to tell us a sort of beautiful Platonic myth, with that same simplicity with which the Greeks have demonstrated almost all the great truths, leaving to modern scruples the task of investigating them. But, if I hold that reading, in its prime essence—which consists in a miraculous and fruitful power of being able to remain in communication with others even when we are encased in our own spiritual solitude—is something more than, something different from, what Ruskin thought it—I still do not believe that it plays the overwhelmingly important part in our mental existence which he appears to maintain.

Its limitations are the direct consequences of its virtues; and, if we ask what, precisely, those virtues are, I find the answer to lie in the kind of reading that we enjoy in childhood. What that book was which, a few pages back, you watched me reading beside the dining room fire, or upstairs, in my bedroom, ensconced in an armchair with a crochet-work antimacassar, or, on fine afternoons, beneath the hazels and the hawthorns of the park, where breezes from the distant view played silently about me, bringing to my careless senses, with no word spoken, the smell of the clover and the hay on which, from time to time, I would rest my weary eyes—you do not know. Peer as closely as you may, you can never find the answer to that question across the gulf of twenty years, and must rely upon my memory—more suited to that species of vision—to tell you that it was Théophile Gautier's *Le Capitaine Fracasse*. Two or three passages in it I loved with an especial fervour, thinking them the most original, the loveliest, in the whole volume. It was impossible for me to believe that any other author had written anything comparable. But I had the feeling that their beauty corresponded to a reality of which Théophile Gautier gave me



but a few fleeting glimpses. And, since I was convinced that he *must* know the whole of it, I longed to read others of his books, books containing passages no less beautiful, and designed to give me information on all the subjects on which I wanted to have his views. 'Laughter is not by nature cruel: it distinguishes man from the lower animals, and it is thus that it is shown in the Odyssey of Homer, the Grecian poet, as being an attribute of the happy and immortal Gods, who take their fill of Olympian laughter through the long leisures of eternity.'<sup>1</sup> This passage made me feel quite drunk. It seemed to me that I could catch glimpses of an ancient world of wonder beyond that Middle Age which Gautier alone had the power to reveal to me. But I should have preferred that, instead of saying these things as though by stealth, after concluding a tedious description of some castle—which contained so many words of which I did not know the meaning that I could never conjure up a picture of it—he had filled his volume with similar passages, and had spoken to me of matters which, the book once

<sup>1</sup> In point of fact, this passage does not occur, or not in this form, in *Le Capitaine Fracasse*. Instead of '—it is thus that it is shown in the Odyssey of Homer, the Grecian poet'—he says, more simply, 'according to Homer'. But because the expressions—'It is shown in Homer', 'it is shown in the Odyssey', which do occur elsewhere in the book, gave me an identical quality of delight, I have taken the liberty, in order to make the example more striking, and now that I no longer feel for his words the religious veneration that once I did, of running all these beauties into one. Besides, elsewhere in *Le Capitaine Fracasse*, Homer is referred to as 'the Grecian poet', and I am quite sure that I found that phrase, too, enchanting. All the same, I am not now capable of recreating those early enjoyments with sufficient precision to feel sure that I have not forced the note, and been guilty of exaggeration, by concentrating so many marvels into a single passage. I don't *think* I have. I think, with regret, that the sense of exaltation with which I repeated that excerpt from *Le Capitaine Fracasse* to the periwinkles and the water-flags that hung above the river bank, kicking the pebbles of the path as I sauntered there, might have been still more delicious could I have found in one single phrase of Gautier's all those charms which my later ingenuity has brought together now, when, alas! they no longer give me any pleasure at all!



finished, I could have gone on knowing and loving. I should have liked him, the sole repository of wisdom and of truth, to tell me what I ought really to think of Shakespeare, of Saintine, of Sophocles, of Euripides, of Silvio Pellico, authors whom I had read one ice-cold March, walking, stamping my feet, running along the road each time I closed the book in a gust of exaltation, in my anxiety to give expression to the vitality which I had accumulated as I sat motionless and absorbed, whipped by the healthy wind that blew down the village street. Particularly did I want him to tell me whether I should have a better chance of arriving at the truth by staying on in the sixth form, and whether I should be better advised, later on, to go into the Diplomatic Service or become a High Court lawyer. But no sooner was the fine phrase finished, than he went on at once to describe a table 'which was covered with a layer of dust so thick that a man might write his name upon it with his thumb'—a detail so trivial, in my opinion, that I could not even give it my attention. I was reduced to wondering what other books Gautier had written which might better satisfy my aspirations, and let me into the secret of his total thought.

Indeed, the great, the marvellous power possessed by good books (which makes us realise the part, at once essential yet limited, that reading can play in our mental lives) lies in this, that what the author may treat as 'Conclusions' can, for the reader, be 'Incitements'. We have a strong feeling that our own wisdom begins just where that of the author finishes, and we want him to give us answers when all that he can offer are desires. And these desires books can awake in us only by compelling us to contemplate the final beauty to which they provide a gate, by squeezing the last drop from the art of which they are the embodiment. As the result of a curious but providential law of our mental vision (a law, perhaps, which means that we can never receive the truth from anybody, but must always be creating it for ourselves), what is the end of their wisdom inevitably appears to us as the beginning of ours, so that it is at the precise moment when they have told us all



they have to tell that they wake in us the feeling that, as yet, they have told us nothing at all.

But if we put to them questions that they cannot answer, we demand of them, too, replies that would be for us empty of all instruction. For one of the effects of the love which the poets wake in us, is that it makes us attach a literal significance to matters which, for them, are expressive only of emotions personal to themselves. In each picture that they show us, they seem to be doing no more than let us catch sight of some marvellous place, different from all other places in the world, deep into which we would have them guide us. 'Lead on', we long to say to Monsieur Maeterlinck, to Madame de Noailles, 'into that "garden of Zeland where grow old-fashioned flowers", along those roads "scented with mugwort", and into all the places of the earth of which you have spoken in your books, and which to your eyes, are no less beautiful.' We should like to see that field which Millet (for the painters teach us no less than do the poets) shows us in his *Spring*. We should like Monsieur Claude Monet to take us to Giverny, on the banks of the Seine, to that bend of the river which he barely reveals through the mists of morning. Now, in fact, it was the mere chance of going to stay with friends or relations that led Madame de Noailles, Maeterlinck, Millet or Claude Monet, to paint one particular garden, one particular field, one particular bend of the river, rather than another. What makes them seem to us more beautiful than the rest of the world is that they give, like some vague reflection, the effect that they produced on genius. It would appear to us just as remarkable, just as despotic, no matter what insignificant and submissive corner of the world they might have happened to paint. The appearance with which they charm and hallucinate us, and into which we long to penetrate, is the very essence of that something—in a two-dimensional rendering—that mirage caught and fixed upon a piece of canvas—which is what we mean by 'vision'. The mist which our eager eyes would pierce is the last word of the painter's art. The supreme effort of the writer, as of the graphic artist, can do no more than lift for us a corner of



the veil of ugliness and insignificance which leaves us incurious before the spectacle of the universe.

'Look, look!'—he says:

*'Parfumés de trèfle et d'armoise,  
Serrant leurs vifs ruisseaux étroits  
Les pays de l'Aisne et de l'Oise.'*

Look at that house in Zeland, all pink and shining like a shell upon the seashore. Look well and learn to use your eyes.' And even while he speaks, he vanishes. Of such is the glory of books, and of such their inadequacy. To turn reading into a discipline is to set too great a value on what is only an initiation. It stands upon the threshold of the life of the spirit: it can show us the way in, but it is not, in itself, that life.

There are however, certain cases, certain pathological cases, if I may so describe them, of mental depression, for which reading can become a species of curative discipline, whose function it is, by repeated stimulus, to re-introduce the mind into the life of the spirit. Here, books play a part analogous to that of psychotherapy in particular types of neurasthenic ailments.

We know that there are diseases of the nervous system, as a result of which the patient, though he may have nothing organically wrong with him, becomes bogged in a sort of paralysis of the will, as in some deep rut, from which he cannot extricate himself unaided, and in which he will, at long last, perish utterly unless a strong and helping hand is stretched to him. His brain, his limbs, his lungs, his stomach, all are intact. There is no *physical* reason why he should not work, walk, endure cold, and eat as usual. But though he is perfectly capable of performing these actions, he lacks the will to do so. A state of organic decay sets in which will end by producing the equivalent of all the ailments from which, in reality, he does not suffer, and which are the incurable consequences of his lack of will-power, unless a stimulus which he cannot find in himself is provided from outside, provided, that is, by a doctor who can do his willing for him until such time as his



own responses shall have been gradually re-educated. Now, there are minds of a certain type that it is possible to compare with cases of this kind, minds which a species of laziness or frivolity prevents from striking spontaneously into their own deepest regions where the real life of the spirit has its origins.<sup>1</sup> Once they have been shown the way, they are perfectly capable of discovering for themselves, and of exploiting, the rich veins that lie there: but without this help from outside, they will continue to live on the surface in a state of perpetual unawareness, in a sort of passivity, which makes them the playthings of every passing pleasure, and reduces them to the stature of those who surround them, dissipating their energies so that, like the man of gentle birth who, because, since earliest childhood, he had shared the life of highway-robbers, forgot even his name because it was so many years since he had used it, they will end by erasing in themselves all feeling and all memory of spiritual

<sup>1</sup> I find the seed of what I am describing in Fontanes, of whom Sainte-Beuve said: 'The instincts of the epicurean were very strong in him . . . and, but for a habit of mind which one can describe only by using the word *material*, he would, given his talents, have produced a great deal more than he did . . . and of a much more durable nature.' It should be noted that the mental impotent always claims that he is nothing of the sort. Fontanes says:

*Je perds mon temps s'il faut les croire,,  
Eux seuls du siècle sont l'honneur*

and insists that he does a great deal of work. The case of Coleridge was even more pathological. 'No man of his time, or perhaps of any time', says Carpenter (quoted by Ribot in his excellent book on *Les Maladies de la Volonté*) 'combined to a greater extent than did Coleridge the power of philosophic reasoning with the imagination of the poet, etc . . . Yet, no one equipped with such remarkable gifts ever got so little from them. The great defect of his character was that he lacked the will to profit from his natural abilities. His mind was always full of grandiose projects, not one of which did he ever seriously attempt to realise. Early in his career he found a generous bookseller who promised to pay him thirty guineas for the poems that he was in the habit of reciting. He preferred to come each week to this man as a beggar, rather than to furnish a single line of the poem which he had only to write down in order to free himself from his embarrassments.'



greatness, unless some external stimulus inject a kind of mental strength, thus enabling them to re-discover the power to think for themselves and to become creative. Now, this stimulus which the lazy mind cannot find on its own account, and which must come from outside, cannot be effective unless it reaches down to the roots of that loneliness in the individual, shorn of which, as we have seen, the creative activity, which is precisely what has got to be revived, cannot come into operation. The lazy mind can get nothing from *pure* solitude, because it is incapable, unaided, of getting its creative activity to work. Nor will mere conversation, no matter how elevated in tone, nor the most urgent advice, have any effect, since these things can do nothing to produce such a highly individualised activity. What, then, is needed is some sort of intervention, which, though it may come from elsewhere, does stir the requisite consciousness in ourselves, an impulse having its origin outside ourselves, but received into the very centre of our personal loneliness. This, as I have explained, is the true definition of reading, and it fits no other activity. The only discipline that can exercise a beneficent influence on minds of the kind I have been describing, is that of reading—Q.E.D. as the geometers say. But the important thing to realise is that reading can be only a stimulus, and can never become a substitute for the working of our own minds. It confines its operation to restoring to us the use of our own faculties, just as in the cases of nervous disease to which I have referred, the psychotherapist can do no more than re-educate in the patient the *will* to employ his stomach, his limbs and his brain, which have nothing organically the matter with them. Whether it is that every human mind suffers, to some extent, from this sort of laziness, this stagnation of the lower levels of consciousness, or whether the excitement that follows in the wake of certain kinds of reading, and, without being absolutely necessary, does exercise a beneficent influence on a man's work, the fact remains that a very large number of writers have always been in the habit of reading a passage from some good book before themselves settling down to work. Thus, Emerson scarcely ever began to write without first reading a



few pages of Plato, nor is Dante the only poet whom Virgil piloted to the gates of Paradise.

So long as reading is treated as a guide holding the keys that open the door to buried regions of ourselves, into which, otherwise, we should never penetrate, the part it can play in our lives is salutary. On the contrary, it becomes dangerous when, instead of waking us to the reality of our own mental processes, it becomes a substitute for them: when truth appears to us, not as an ideal which we can realise only as a result of our own thinking and our own emotional efforts, but as a material *object* which exists between the pages of a book, like honey made by others, to be possessed merely by stretching out our hands to a bookshelf and passively digesting it in a mood of bodily and mental torpor. There are times, though they occur but rarely, and are, consequently, as we shall see, less dangerous, when the truth, conceived as something external to ourselves, lies at a distance, concealed in some place that is difficult of access. It may be contained in some secret document, in some collection of unpublished letters, in a series of Memoirs which may throw unexpected light on certain persons, and which it may be hard to come by. What happiness, what rest for the mind wearied by the search for truth within itself, to be able to feel sure that it lies elsewhere, in some folio, for instance, jealously guarded in an obscure Dutch Convent! And if we have to make a considerable effort to get a sight of it, it will be wholly of a material kind which will bring a sense of blessed, of delightful, relaxation. It may mean making a long journey, crossing in a barge the gusty flats where the reeds bow before the wind and raise their heads again in endless undulation. It may mean stopping at Dordrecht whose ivy-covered church is reflected in a complicated network of sluggish canals, and in the tremulous and golden waters of the Meuse where, at evening, the gliding boats disturb the images of red roofs and blue sky. And then, even when we have reached our journey's end, it may be by no means certain that the truth will be imparted to us. In order to get what we want, we may have to exert powerful influences, may have to pay court to the Venerable Archbishop



of Utrecht with his fine old Jansenist face, may have to deal with the pious guardian of the archives at Amersfoort. In such cases the conquest of truth appears in the guise of a sort of diplomatic mission in which the difficulties of the journey and the chances and changes of negotiation play an equal part. But what does it matter? The officials of the little old church at Utrecht on whom we depend for a sight of the truth we seek, are all so anxious to help, are so charming. Their seventeenth century faces are a blessed change after all the faces to which we are accustomed. How amusing it will be to keep in touch with their owners, if only through the medium of letters! From time to time they will send us a token of their respect. How definitely that raises us in our own estimation! We shall treasure those letters, not only as curiosities, but as testimonials to the importance with which they regard us! One day we shall dedicate a book to them—the least we can do for those who have made us a present of—the Truth. And as to the small amount of research, the brief labours which we shall have to undertake in the Convent library, as an indispensable preliminary to the discovery of that Truth, of which, for greater certainty, and that it may not escape us, we shall make copious notes, it would ill beseem us to complain of the trouble to which we may be put. The calm and the freshness of the old Convent are exquisite. The nuns still wear the high, white-winged hennin which we see in the pictures by Roger van der Weyden that hang in the parlour: and, while we work, the seventeenth century carillons bemuse with their gentle sound the simple-hearted waters of the canal set all a-dazzle by a flicker of pale sunlight between the double row of trees, stripped by the onset of autumn, which brush the little mirrors hanging on the gabled houses that stand along the banks.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I need hardly say that the reader will search in vain for this Convent close to Utrecht, or that this passage is wholly imaginary. It was, however, suggested to me by the following paragraph taken from Monsieur Léon Séché's book on Sainte-Beuve: '... While he [Sainte-Beuve] was in Liège, he took it into his head to pay a visit to Utrecht. It was somewhat late, but Utrecht is a long way from Paris, and I



This conception of a Truth that is deaf to the appeals of unaided reason, but responsive to the pulling of strings, of a Truth to which we can obtain access through the medium of letters of recommendation given us by some man who is guardian of the material fact, though ignorant, perhaps, of the real nature of what he controls, of a Truth that can be copied into a note-book—this conception is a great deal less dangerous than some. It often happens that for the historian, or even for the erudite scholar, this Truth which he seeks in a book situated some great way off, is not, strictly speaking, so much the Truth itself, as a pointer to it or its verification, so that room is left for another Truth which it merely announces or proves, a Truth which, in itself, is the creation of those who seek it. The same cannot be said for the man of letters. He reads for the sake of reading, and in order to retain what he has read. For him a book is not the angel who takes wing as soon as he has opened the gates of the Heavenly Garden, but a motionless idol adored for its own sake, which, instead of receiving true dignity from the thoughts that it inspires, communicates an unreal dignity to all around it. The man of letters smilingly pronounces his invocation to the honour of some name that

doubt whether *Volupté* would have gained him a welcome to the archives of Amersfoort. This I doubt the more, because, even after the appearance of the two first volumes of his *Port-Royal*, the devout scholar who was then in charge of them, etc . . . It was with considerable difficulty that Sainte-Beuve got permission from Monsieur Karsten to look into certain boxes . . . Open the second edition of *Port-Royal* and you will find an acknowledgment to Monsieur Karsten for his kindness.' (Léon Séché, *Sainte-Beuve*, Vol I, p 229 et seq.) The details of the journey are based on actual impressions. I am not sure whether one passes Dordrecht on the way to Utrecht, but I have described Dordrecht as I saw it. It was on my way to Vollendam, not Utrecht, that I travelled in a barge between the reedy banks. The canal, which I have situated at Utrecht, is, in fact, at Delft. It was in the Hospital of Beaune that I saw the picture by Roger Van de Weyden, and several nuns belonging, I believe, to an Order which had come originally, from Flanders, wearing headdresses which resemble those, not in the Roger Van der Weyden, but in other pictures that I saw in Holland.



occurs in Villehardouin or Boccaccio, or to the interest of some custom to be found described in Virgil.<sup>1</sup> Since his temperament lacks any kind of inner initiative, it cannot separate out from the books he reads those elements in their substance that might give it strength. He swallows them whole, so that, instead of being digested, passing into his system, and becoming a life-principle, they remain foreign bodies and act upon him as a principle of death. Need I add, that, if I qualify this taste, this sort of literary fetishism, as unhealthy, I am contrasting it with what *would* be the ideal procedure of a completely faultless mind, if such existed—which it doesn't. In fact, I am behaving in precisely the same way as those physiologists who describe a normal functioning of the organs such as is scarcely ever found in human beings. In reality, since there are no such things as perfect minds, any more than there are entirely healthy bodies, those who are what we call 'great spirits' are afflicted no less than others by this literary sickness: one might even say *more* than others. It looks as though a taste for books grows, *pari passu*, with the intelligence; at a slightly lower level, perhaps, but from the same stalk, just as every passion is accompanied by a predilection for what surrounds its object, is connected with it, and, when that object is absent, acts as its spokesman. Thus, the greatest writers, during such times as they are not in direct contact with the stream of thought, take their pleasure in the society of books. After all, is it not for men of this kind that books are written, and do they not owe

<sup>1</sup> 'Snobisme' in its pure form is far more innocent. To take pleasure in somebody's company merely because one of his ancestors went on the Crusades, is a matter of vanity: intelligence has nothing whatever to do with it. But to take pleasure in somebody's society because his grandfather's name is frequently mentioned in Alfred de Vigny or in Chateaubriand, or (and I don't mind admitting that I find this particular seduction quite irresistible) because her family arms appear in the great Rose-Window of Amiens (I am thinking of a lady who is worthy of admiration for quite other reasons)—that is where intellectual sin really begins. I have analysed all this at such excessive length elsewhere, that, although much remains to be said on the subject, I do not intend to pursue it here.



to them the discovery of a host of beauties which remain hidden from the eyes of the vulgar? But, to be perfectly candid, the fact that 'superior minds' are what is usually called 'bookish', in no way proves that to be so is not a fault. Because a great many mediocre persons are often hard workers, and a great many intelligent persons are often lazy, it does not follow that work is not a better discipline for the mind than laziness. Nevertheless, when we come across one of our own defects in a great man, we are always inclined to wonder whether actually it may not be, after all, a quality which has quite unjustly got a bad name. Inevitably we feel a certain amount of pleasure when we learn that Hugo knew Quintus Curtius, Tacitus and Justin by heart, and that he was perfectly capable, when the legitimate use of a word was being discussed in his hearing, of tracing it back to its grammatical origins, supporting his view by a series of quotations which went to prove how genuinely erudite he was: (I have shown elsewhere how, in his case, reading stimulated his genius instead of stifling it, as a bundle of twigs will put out a small fire, but feed a big one). Maeterlinck, whom I regard as being the very opposite of the man of letters, whose receptivity is for ever open to a thousand undefined emotions impinging upon it from the hive, the flower-bed, or the growing grass, reassures us magnificently on the dangers of erudition, almost of bibliophily, when, as an amateur, he describes the engravings which adorn some old edition of Jacob Cats or the Abbé Sandrus. These dangers, furthermore, when they do exist, threaten the intelligence to a very much less extent than they do the sensibility: and the power of reading with profit, if I may so describe it, is greater among thinkers than among imaginative writers. Schopenhauer, for instance, provides an example of a temperament so vital that it can support without difficulty the burden of a vast amount of reading, because for him each new piece of information was immediately reduced to the dimensions of the fragment of living reality which it contained.

Schopenhauer never advances an opinion without supporting it with numerous quotations, but we always feel that the texts which he cites are, for him, only unconscious and anticipated



allusions in which it pleases him to find certain characteristics of his own thought, though they can never be said to have inspired it. I remember a passage in *The World as Will and Representation* in which some twenty quotations occur one after the other. He is discussing pessimism (naturally, I condense the quotations of which he makes use) and says:

. . . Voltaire, in *Candide*, wages war on optimism in a spirit of fun. Byron does the same thing, tragically, in *Cain*. Herodotus tells us that the Thebans greeted all newborn infants with groans, and rejoiced at the news of death. It is the attitude expressed by Plutarch in those fine lines—*Lugere genitum, tanta qui intravit mala*, etc. To this same attitude we may attribute the Mexican custom of wishing, etc. . . . Swift observed it insofar as, from the days of his early manhood (if we are to believe Sir Walter Scott's 'Life' of him), he greeted every birthday as a day of affliction. Everybody knows the passage in the *Apology* of Socrates in which Plato says that death is a great good. One of the Maxims of Heraclitus was similarly inspired: *Vitæ nomen quidem est, opus autem mors*. The lovely lines of Theognis are well known: *Optima sors homini non esse*, etc. Sophocles, in the *Oedipus at Colonus* offers a shortened form of the same thought: *Natum non esse vincit alias omnes*, etc. Euripides says: *Omnis hominum vita est plena dolo dolore* (Hippolytus), and Homer long ago remarked: *Non enim quidquam alicubi est calamitosius homine omium, quotquot super terram spirant*, etc. Pliny, too, has *Nullum melius esse tempestiva morte*. Shakespeare puts these words into the mouth of the old king, Henry IV: *Oh, if this were seen, the happiest youth would shut the book and sit him down and die*. According to Byron: *'Tis something better not to be*. Balthazar Gracian paints for us a picture of existence in the blackest possible colours, and his *Criticon*, etc.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Schopenhauer: *The World as Will and Representation*: the chapter on 'The Vanity and Sufferings of Life'



Were it not that I am tired of following Schopenhauer too far along the road, I should take considerable pleasure in completing the argument by reference to the *Aphorisms on the Place of Wisdom in Life*, which, more than any other work that I know, presupposes in its author not only a vast amount of learning, but great originality as well. Yet, on the flyleaf of that book, which is crammed full of quotations, Schopenhauer could write, with perfect seriousness, 'Compiling is not my strong point'.

Friendship, no doubt, which concerns individuals, is a frivolous pursuit, and reading is a form of friendship. But it is, at least, a sincere friendship, and the fact that it is felt for the dead, for the absent, makes it, in some sort, disinterested and almost touching. It is, too, a friendship stripped of everything that makes other friendships ugly. Since we are all of us, all living persons, really only dead men who have not begun to exercise their function as such, all those little acts of politeness, those salutations in the vestibule of our final home, which we call deference, gratitude, devotion, and in which we mingle so many lies, are sterile and wearying. Nor is that all: from the very first moment that sympathy, admiration, a sense of gratitude, takes shape in us—the earliest words that we utter, the earliest letters that we write, weave round us the first strands of a net of habit, a way of being, from which, in subsequent friendships, we can never free ourselves—to say nothing of the fact that all the while the excessive sentiments that we have voiced stay with us like I.O.U.s which we shall have to meet, and which will cost us high for the rest of our lives in remorse that we ever protested them at all. In reading, friendship is suddenly brought back to its pristine purity. We have not got to be amiable when we are dealing with books. If we spend an evening with them, it is because we want to, and it is true to say that they are the one set of friends of whom, quite often, we take our leave with feelings of regret. And when we have left them we are oppressed with none of those thoughts that spoil friendship—what did they think of us?—didn't we behave rather tactlessly?—did they like us?—or with the fear that we may



be forgotten by someone. All such agitations expire on the threshold of the pure, unruffled friendship which is what reading really is. Nor are we oppressed with a sense of deference: we laugh at what Molière says only if we find it genuinely funny: when he bores us, we don't mind looking bored, and when we have had enough of his company, we put him back on the shelf as sharply and decisively as though he were neither a genius nor famous. The atmosphere of this 'pure' friendship is silence, which is far purer than speech. We speak for others, but keep silence for ourselves. Silence carries no trace, as do words, of our faults and grimaces. It is pure: it is *really* an atmosphere. Between the author's thought and our own it interposes none of those irreducible, those refractory, elements which are the outcome of our several egotisms, and get in the way of thought. The very language of a book is pure (if what we are reading deserves the name of book), made transparent by the author's thought which has drained from it all that was not itself, so that the printed word comes to image it faithfully, every phrase, when reduced to its essence, resembling every other phrase, since all carry the unique inflexion which is the writer's personality; so that we find in the whole a sort of continuity which the impact of life, with its charge of alien elements, excludes, and can follow every line of the recorded thinking, which is the author's physiognomy seen reflected in the calm mirror of his pages. We can take our pleasure in each recurrent trait, irrespective of whether it is, or is not, worthy of admiration. It is a great delight for the mind to be able to distinguish these pictures of the deep-seated realities of the soul of another, and to love him with a fondness that has nothing egotistic about it, that cuts no literary capers, and moves, as it were, in the secrecy of our own hearts. It is in this way that, for instance, Gautier, a simple, decent fellow with plenty of taste (it is amusing to think that he was once regarded as a representative of perfection in art) pleases us. In no way do we exaggerate his intellectual powers, and, in his *Voyage en Espagne*, each phrase—though he does not know it—underlines and follows the gay and gracious character of his personality (the



words falling of themselves into the order necessary for its expression, because it has chosen them and duly determined their arrangement). We cannot help feeling that true art has nothing to do with that feeling of his that he *must* provide a complete description of every natural form, to the accompaniment of a comparison which, since it is not the product of any stirring or pleasing impression, is incapable of charming us. We cannot but find his imagination pitifully dry when he compares the country scene, with its variations of crops, to a tailor's specimen card—'on which samples of materials for waistcoats and trousers are displayed', or when he says that there is nothing to admire between Paris and Angoulême. We smile at this fervent lover of the gothic who will not even take the trouble to pay a visit to the cathedral of Chartres.<sup>1</sup>

But what good humour, what taste! and how gladly we accompany so enthusiastic a companion in his various adventures. He is so agreeable that we find the scenes through which he moves agreeable too. He spends a few days with Captain Lebarbier de Tinan, confined by bad weather to his ship that 'sparkles like gold', and we feel sad that he says no more about that pleasing sailorman, but tears us away with never a word to explain what became of him.<sup>2</sup> We are perfectly well aware that his bouncing gaiety, and his moods of melancholy, too, are equally the product of his untidy journalistic habits. But we forgive him all that. We do just what he wants us to do, laugh when he comes in soaked to the skin, half dead with hunger and fatigue, and share his sadness when he reckons up with the easy melancholy of a penny-a-liner, the names of those of his

<sup>1</sup> 'I am sorry that I passed close by Chartres without being able to see the cathedral' (*Voyage en Espagne*, p. 2)

<sup>2</sup> I am told that he afterwards became that famous Admiral de Tinan, the father of Madame Pochet de Tinan, whose memory is cherished by all artists, and the grandfather of a brilliant cavalry officer. He, too, it was, I believe, who, at Gaeta, kept open for a while the communications of Francois II and the Queen of Naples, and made it possible for them to get supplies. (see Pierre de la Gorce: *Histoire du Second Empire*)



## DAYS OF READING

generation untimely dead. I remarked a while back that his phrases paint his physiognomy, though without his being aware of the fact. For if the words we use are chosen, not by what is deepest in our thought, but by a desire to paint our own portrait, they end by expressing only that desire and not ourselves at all. Fromentin and Musset, in spite of their gifts, and just because they were so anxious to leave their portraits to posterity, achieve only middling results, which, however, we find extremely interesting, because their very failure is instructive. Even when a book is not the mirror of a striking personality, it still remains the mirror of a mind's curious defects. Absorbed in a book by Fromentin or Musset, we see at the heart of the first all its author's limitations and sillinesses, even though they do constitute a certain 'distinction', and, in the second realise how empty mere rhetoric can be.

If, the more intelligent a man is, the greater is his taste for reading, so, too, as we have seen, is he less exposed to its dangers. An original mind can subordinate its reading to its own personal activity. For its owner it is no more than the noblest of distractions, and the most ennobling too, for reading and knowledge are alone capable of teaching 'good manners' to the mind. The power of sensibility and intelligence can be developed only in ourselves, in the depths of our spiritual life. But it is in contact with other minds—which is what reading is—that the life of the mind can be educated up to a standard of elegance. When all is said, men of letters are the 'people of quality' in the world of the intelligence, and ignorance of this or that book, of this or that detail of literary knowledge, will always be, even in a man of genius, a mark of the intellectual plebeian. In the world of thinkers, as in the world of Society, there is such a thing as distinction, as nobility, as a sort of freemasonry of mental habits and a heritage of traditions.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> True distinction always has the air of addressing itself only to persons of distinction who have certain habits in common. It never condescends to 'explain'. A book by Anatole France implies a wealth of erudite knowledge, and contains an enormous number of allusions to which the vulgar are blind, and which, quite apart from its other



Very soon, in this taste and relaxation of reading, great writers show a preference for the ancients. Even those whom their contemporaries ranked high among the 'Romantics' scarcely ever read anything but the classics. When, in conversation, Victor Hugo spoke of reading, the names that most frequently came to his lips were those of Molière and Horace, of Ovid and Regnard. Alphonse Daudet, that least literary of writers, whose work, so modern, so brimful of life, seems to have turned its back on the whole classical heritage, was for ever reading, quoting and commenting on Pascal, Montaigne, Diderot and Tacitus.<sup>1</sup> One is almost inclined to say, and so to renew, by virtue of a generalisation that cannot but be incomplete, the old distinction between classics and romantics, that it is the public (I need hardly point out that I mean the intelligent public) that is romantic, and the masters (even the so-called romantic masters, the masters who are preferred by the romantic public) who are classic (a remark that might be extended to beauties, is a contributing factor in the general impression of incomparable nobility which it produces.

<sup>1</sup> No doubt that is often the reason why, when a great imaginative writer takes to criticism, he has so much to say about new editions of old books, and so very little about the books of his contemporaries. Examples of this tendency are—Sainte Beuve's *Lundis* and the *Vie Littéraire* of Anatole France. But while Monsieur Anatole France is an excellent judge of his contemporaries, it is safe to say that Sainte-Beuve completely failed to understand the great writers of his own day. Nor is it any answer, that he was blinded by personal antipathies. After quite incredibly underrating Stendhal the novelist, he praises, by way of compensation, the modesty and delicacy of Stendhal the man, as though that were the best he could say of him! This blindness in Sainte-Beuve to all that concerned his own times is in curious contrast to his claim that he was both clear-sighted and far-seeing. 'The whole world', he says, in his *Chateaubriand et son groupe littéraire*, 'is ready enough to pass judgment on Racine and Bossuet, but it is only when dealing with new works, with works not yet stamped with the hall-mark of popular approval, that a man shows whether he possesses the wisdom of a judge and the perspicacity of a critic. The gift of genuine criticism consists in being able to judge at first sight, to uncover buried talent, to be in advance of one's times. How few have it!'



cover all the arts). The public rushes off to listen to the music of Monsieur Vincent d'Indy, while Monsieur Vincent d'Indy is busy renewing his acquaintance with the music of Monsigny.<sup>1</sup> The public crowds into the exhibitions of Monsieur Vuillard and Monsieur Maurice Denis, while those gentlemen are disporting themselves at the Louvre. No doubt the reason for this is that the forms of contemporary thought which artists of genuine originality make accessible, and a source of pleasure, to the public, are so much a part of themselves, that, for relaxation, they turn to the thought of others who were as different as possible from them. It needs on their part a greater effort of comprehension, but the pleasure it gives them is also greater. One always likes, in one's reading, to get away, to some extent, from oneself, to do a bit of travelling. But there is another reason, too—which I prefer—why great minds like old books, and this, in conclusion, I shall now proceed to explain. It is this, that old books not only, as do their modern counterparts, give us the beauty which the minds of their creators deliberately put into them. They are the receptacles of another, a more moving, kind of beauty which is born of

<sup>1</sup> Similarly, the classics have no better commentators than the 'romantics'. The romantics are the only people who really know how to read the classics, because they read them as they were written, that is to say, 'romantically', and because if one would read a poet or a prose-writer properly, one must be, not a scholar, but a poet or a prose-writer. That is true for the least 'romantic' of books. It was not the professors of rhetoric who drew our attention to Boileau's lovely verses, but Victor Hugo:

*Et dans quatre mouchoirs de sa beauté salis  
Envoie au blanchisseur ses roses et ses lys.*

and Monsieur Anatole France:

*l'ignorance et l'erreur à ses naissantes pièces  
En habits de marquis, en robes de comtesses.*

The last number of *La Renaissance Latine* (15 May, 1905) which appeared just as I was correcting the proofs of this essay, gives me the opportunity, by furnishing a fresh example of what I mean, to extend this remark to the fine arts. An article by Monsieur Maclair offers us the spectacle of Monsieur Rodin acting as the heaven-sent appraiser of Greek statuary.



the fact that their *substance*, in other words the language in which they are written, is, as it were, 'a mirror of life'.<sup>1</sup> Something of the pleasure that one finds in sauntering through a town like Beaune, which has kept intact its fifteenth century Hospital, with its well, its wash-house, its vaulted and panelled rooms with their painted beams, its high-gabled roof pierced with dormer windows below a fretted covering of hammered lead (all of them things that a vanished epoch has, so to speak, left behind it; things that belonged to it alone, because no subsequent age has ever given birth to their like) one can still feel, to some small extent, in wandering through a Racine tragedy or a volume of Saint-Simon. For they contain all the lovely forms of a vanished manner of speech, such as preserve the memory of customs or of fashions in feeling that exist no longer, persistent traces of a past which nothing now resembles, but whose colour the obliterating passage of time can still revive.

A Racine tragedy, a volume of the Memoirs of Sainte-Simon

<sup>1</sup> And this is why we ought always to read the classic authors in full, and not rest content with selected passages. An author's famous passages are often those in which the intimate texture of language is hidden beneath the beauty, beneath the universal quality, if I may so put it, which marks the whole. To my mind, the peculiar essence of Glück's music is to be found not so much in this or that ravishing melody, as in the cadence of his recitatives, where the harmony is like the very voice of his genius when it drops to an involuntary intonation and shows in all its simple gravity and distinction; when, so to speak, it pauses for breath. A man who has seen photographs of St Mark's at Venice may believe (I speak only of the exterior of the building) that he has an idea of what the church with its cupolas looks like. But, actually, it is only if one approaches it until one is close enough to touch with one's hand the diapered curtain of its gleaming columns, it is only when one sees the curiously solemn appearance of strength which envelopes the leaves and perching birds of the capitals, which one can make out properly only when one is right up to them, it is only when, from the Piazza, one gets the impression of the low, longitudinal façade, with its florid flag-poles, its holiday air, its look as of an 'Exhibition' pavilion, that one feels its true and complex individuality *explode*, as it were, into a wealth of significant, yet purely accessory, detail which no photograph can ever show,



are gracious things the like of which we have not with us now. The language in which they have been carved by great artists, with a freedom that brings out its soft gleam, and sets its native force a-leaping, moves us like the spectacle of certain marbles now used no longer, but which once the artist worked in. Doubtless, in some of these old edifices the stone has faithfully preserved the craftsman's very thought, but also, thanks to him, the stone itself, of a species unknown today, has been preserved for us, clothed in all the colours which the master could draw from it, could bring to the eye, and set in harmonious order. It is the living syntax of seventeenth century France—and of customs and manners of thought now dead—which we love to find in Racine's lines. It is the very form of that syntax, stripped of all covering, made honourable and lovely by his keen, yet ever sensitive, chisel, that moves us, familiar though we are with its every oddity, its every daring turn, and whose concentrated design we see pass like a swift dart of light, or hang fire in beautiful, broken rhythms, in the gentlest and most tender passages.<sup>1</sup> It is these forms of language, wrested from the past, that are offered to our eyes as might be some ancient and unruined city. In their presence we feel the same sort of emotion as when we find ourselves confronted by certain architectural shapes, they, too, outmoded, which we can

<sup>1</sup> I am sure, for instance, that the charm which we are accustomed to find in those lines spoken by Adromaque:

*Pourquoi l'assassiner? Qu'a-t-il fait? A quel titre?  
Qui te l'a dit?*

comes precisely from the fact that the normal sequence of the syntax has been deliberately broken. '*A quel titre?*' is related not to '*Qu'a-t-il fait?*' which immediately precedes it, but to '*Pourquoi l'assassiner?*' '*Qui te l'a dit?*' also refers to '*l'assassiner*'. (One realises too, remembering other lines of Andromaque, that '*Qui te l'a dit?*' stands for '*Qui te l'a dit de l'assassiner?*'). These are zigzags of expression (the recurrent broken line to which I have already referred) which have the effect of somewhat obscuring the sense, and I have even heard a great actress, who was more concerned with making the meaning clear, than with the demands of prosody, say '*Pourquoi l'assassiner? A quel*

admire only in such rare and magnificent examples as have been bequeathed to us by the past that fashioned them: city walls, castle keeps and towers, the baptisteries of churches, the little cemetery close to the cloister or beneath the charnel-house at Aitre, which dreams in the hot sun, forgetful, under its butterflies and flowers, of the Funerary Urn and the Lantern of the Dead.

But it is not only single phrases that give us the very shape and contour of vanished minds. Between the phrases—I am thinking now of those ancient books that, originally, were recited—in the intervals that separate them, as in some inviolate shrine, filling the interstices of stone, there lies for us today a silence as old as all the ages. Often in St Luke's Gospel, when I come across the *two dots* which precede each of the short sections, almost in the form of canticles, which are scattered up and down the text,<sup>1</sup> I seem to hear the silence of the speaker pausing before beginning to intone the following verses which must have brought to his mind the even older Psalms of the Old Testament.<sup>2</sup> That silence still fills the pause in the phrase which, though broken to make room for the canticle, still keeps its form. More than once as I read it, it

*titre? Qu'a-t-il fait?* Racine's most famous lines have become celebrated because they can produce this sense of delight by reason of a familiar piece of linguistic daring which stands like a dangerous bridge between two gently-rounded banks. '*Je t'aimais inconstant, qu'aurai-je-fait fidèle?*' What pleasure we derive from encountering such expressions, the almost flat simplicity of which gives to the sense, as to certain faces in Mantegna's pictures, a sweet completeness, a marvellous touch of colour!

*Et dans un fol amour ma jeunesse embarquée  
Réunissons trois cœurs qui n'ont pu s'accorder.*

<sup>1</sup> And Mary said: 'My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour', etc . . . 'And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying: Blessed be the Lord God of Israel: for He hath visited and redeemed His people', etc . . . 'Then took him he up in his arms, and blessed God, and said: Lord, now lettest Thou thy servant depart in peace. . .'

<sup>2</sup> Strictly speaking, I can produce no authority in support of my



## DAYS OF READING

has brought to me the perfume of roses drifting through the open window and spreading through the lofty room where the Assembly sat. Though two thousand years have passed that perfume has not evaporated. The *Divine Comedy*, the plays of Shakespeare, also give me the feeling that they have been inserted into the present though they keep their eyes fixed upon the past. It is that sense of inspiration which makes certain 'Days of Reading' resemble other days of saunterings through Venice—for instance, on the Piazzetta, where one is conscious of having before one, in all their half-unreal colour, objects situated but a few paces off, yet centuries away, those two granite columns, pink and grey, which bear upon their summits, one, the Lion of St Mark, the other St Theodore with the crocodile beneath his feet. The two slim strangers came, once upon a time, out of the East, borne across the waves that now break below them. The voices of their new home they cannot understand. But they keep about them still the belated climate of the thirteenth century, amid the clamour of the modern crowd. Set above the public place they stand, and the remote smile upon their lips still shows a bright detachment.

contention that the speaker did, in fact, chant the species of psalms which St Luke introduces into the Gospel. But it seems to me that such a conclusion emerges from a comparison of various passages in Renan, and especially from those in his *St Paul*, p. 257 et seq: his *Les Apôtres*, pp. 99 and 100 and his *Marc-Aurèle*, pp. 502-503, etc.

## DAYS OF READING 2

NO doubt you have read the *Memoirs* of the Comtesse de Boigne. So many people are 'laid up' just now, that books are finding a plentiful supply of readers, even of women readers. Naturally, when one can't go out and visit other people, one would much prefer to have visitors of one's own than to be reduced to reading. But 'with all these epidemics about' there is danger even in visitors. We all know the lady who stops for a moment in the doorway—just for the fraction of a moment—where, a framed and exhibited threat, she says—'I hope you're not afraid of mumps or scarlet-fever. I ought to warn you that my daughter and her children are all down with them. May I come in?'—and come in she does, without waiting for an answer. Then, there is the other kind, less frank, who looks at her watch and remarks 'I must *fly*! My three daughters have got the measles, and I spend my time going from one to the other: my English governess has been in bed since yesterday with a temperature, and I rather think I may be sickening myself. I didn't feel at all well when I got up this morning. But I made a great effort, because I did so much want to come and see you. . . .' So, on the whole, it is better not to have too many visitors. And since one can't be for ever telephoning, one reads—but it is only in the last extremity. One does a lot of telephoning first. And, because we are children who play with the sacred forces of Nature without feeling the slightest awe at their mysteries, we think of the telephone merely as being 'terribly convenient', or, rather, because we are spoilt children, as being 'terribly inconvenient', and fill the columns of the *Figaro* with our grievances, complaining at the slowness of the admirable fairy at the switchboard if sometimes we have to wait a few minutes before we find, close to us, invisible yet present, the lady we have summoned, who, without moving from the table in the distant city where she lives, under a different sky from ours, enjoying weather that is not our weather, in circumstances and with preoccupations



of which we know nothing, though in a few seconds she will be telling us all about them—is suddenly transported over the intervening miles (she, and the whole of her spiritual ‘atmosphere’), and suddenly brought within speaking distance just when we want her. We are like the hero of a fairy story who has only to express a wish, and lo! in a flash the magician shows him his lady-love reading a book, shedding tears, or picking flowers, there at his side, yet all the time very far away wherever she may happen to be.

To renew this miracle, we have but to put our lips to the magic disk and call up—and I admit that at times the answer is slow in coming—the vigilant Virgins whose voices we hear every day, though we never know what they look like—who are our Guardian Angels in that dark and dizzy world over whose gates they maintain a jealous watch: the All-Powerful Fates who conjure up for us the faces of our absent friends, though we are never granted a sight of their own. We have but to summon these Danaïdes of the Invisible who ceaselessly empty, refill, and pass to one another, the dark urns of sound; the jealous Furies who, while we murmur sweet nothings to the lady of our choice, exclaim ironically, ‘I can hear you!’ just at the precise moment when we are hoping that no one else, at all, can hear us; the touchy servants of the Mysteries; the implacable Divinities; the Ladies of the Telephone Exchange. Their call echoes in the ghost-filled darkness of which our ears alone have cognizance. There is a faint sound—an abstract sound—telling of distances annihilated, and suddenly, the voice we want to hear is with us.

If, at that moment there drift through its owner’s open window, assailing her attention while she is speaking to us, the song of some passer-by, the note of a cyclist’s horn, or the far music of a marching regiment, we hear it all as clearly as she does herself (as though to prove to us that it is really she who is there at our elbow, she, with all that surrounds her at the moment, striking on her ear and distracting her attention), details of fact, having nothing to do with the matter in hand, useless in themselves, yet so necessary a proof of the miracle—

quiet, charming touches of local colour, descriptive of the street or the country road on which her windows look, things such as a poet would choose if he wished to 'bring alive' some character in a book, and seek to evoke the circumstances of her daily life.

She is there with us: we hear her voice. Yet, how far away she is! I have often found it hard to listen without a little stab of pain, as though, faced by the impossibility of seeing, without long hours of journeying, the face of her whose voice is at my ear, I could the better realise how deceptive are the seeming contacts that we make with others, be they never so sweet, and how far we may be from the objects of our love at the very moment when we think that we have only to stretch out our hands to touch them. Real presence—that voice so close—yet actual separation: and an anticipation, too, of the last, eternal sundering. Often, thus listening, but out of sight of her whose voice is speaking from so far away, I have felt it to be calling from those depths from which there is no returning, and have known a touch of that agony that will grip my heart on some day in the future when a voice will sound just so, disembodied and alone, rapt from the flesh that I shall never see again, murmuring in my ear such words as I could wish to take in a kiss from lips for ever crumbled into dust.

I have said that before settling down to read, we first try to indulge in conversation, to telephone: and, to that end, we try number after number. But there are times when the Daughters of Darkness, the Messengers of the Word, the Faceless Goddesses, the capricious Guardians of the Gate, will not, or cannot, open to us the way into the Invisible. The Mystery invoked remains deaf to their summons: the aged inventor of printing and the young prince who has a passion for impressionist pictures and motor-cars—Gutenberg and Wagram—so tirelessly assailed, make no reply to their appeals.<sup>1</sup> Then, since one cannot go visiting, since one does not want visitors, since the ladies of the telephone cannot get our connection, we resign ourselves to silence, and turn to books.

In the space of a few short weeks one might read Madame

<sup>1</sup> Gutenberg and Wagram are two Paris telephone exchanges (*Translator*)



de Noailles' new volume of verse—*Les Eblouissements* (though I don't know whether that title will be the one finally decided upon), which is even better than those other works of genius, *Le Cœur Innombrable* and *l'Ombre des Jours*, which I can say with my hand on my heart seem to me to be on a level with *Feuilles d'Automne* and *Fleurs du Mal*. Or one might do worse than read Barrie's pure and exquisite *Margaret Ogilvie*, superbly translated by R. d'Humières, a book that is simply the life of an old countrywoman, told by a poet, her son. But no: when one resigns oneself to reading, one turns for preference to books like the *Memoirs* of Madame de Boigne, books which give the illusion that one is still paying visits, but visits to people on whom one is never otherwise able to call, for the very good reason that in the days of Louis XVI one had not yet been born: but people, for all that, who would not seem so very different from those one knows, because they bear almost the same names, are their descendants, and one's own particular friends, who, with a touching demonstration of solicitude for one's wretched memory, have kept their Christian names unaltered, and are still called Odon, Ghislain, Nivelon, Victurien, Josselin, Léonore, Arts, Tucdual, Adhéaume or Raynulphe—lovely names at which one would do wrong to smile. They come from so distant a past that with their unwonted glitter they seem to glow mysteriously, like the names of prophets or of saints—to be seen in miniature on the stained glass of our cathedrals. Does not even Jehan, though it bears a greater resemblance to a name of our own time, look as though it ought to be written in Gothic characters in a Book of Hours with a brush dipped in ultramarine or azure? Confronted by such names, the vulgar might be tempted to sing that old Montmartre catch which runs:

*Bragance, on le connaît ct'oiseau-là!  
Faut-il que son orgueil soit profonde  
Pour s'être f . . . u un nom comme ça!  
Peut donc pas s'appeler comme tout le monde!*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Which may be very freely rendered:

But the poet, if he is sincere, does not join in such laughter, but, with his eyes fixed on the past which those names call up, will reply with Verlaine:

*Je vois, j'entends beaucoup de choses  
Dans son nom Carlovingien*

A vast and spreading past, perhaps. I should like to think that such names, only rare examples of which have come down to our own day—thanks to a love of tradition which lingers on in some families—were once almost commonplace, born by villeins as well as by nobles, so that in those naively coloured magic-lantern pictures which they bring before our eyes, it is not only the great lord with his blue beard, or Sister Anne on her tower, that we see, but the labourer bending above the verdant green of the field, and the men-at-arms riding along roads thick with thirteenth-century dust.

Naturally enough it often happens that this medieval impression left on us by their names does not stand up to familiarity with those who bear them now, without either retaining or understanding their inherent poetry. But can one reasonably demand that men should show themselves worthy of their names, when even the most beautiful objects find so much difficulty in living up to theirs, when not a city exists, not a river, the sight of which can satisfy that dream-like longing born of the magic of their names? We should be far wiser, instead of going about in Society or undertaking long journeys, to rest content with reading the *Almanach de Gotha* and the Continental Bradshaw.

Memoirs dating from the end of the eighteenth, or the beginning of the nineteenth, century—those, for instance, of the Comtesse de Boigne—are especially suited to stir our emotions, because they set our own, our so drab and ugly, times in a perspective of noble melancholy, by showing them,

Bragance, Ho yus, we knows the bird  
Proper stuck up, not arf!  
Wot's 'e want wiv a name wot nobody's 'eard?  
Bra-bloody-gance, wot a laugh!

(Translator)



so to speak, in the light of History's foreground. Reading them, we find it easy to substitute for the persons we have known—or whom our parents have known—those ancestors of theirs who, whether as the actual writers of such volumes, or merely as characters appearing in them, might have been present at the Revolution and seen Marie Antoinette in the street. The effect of books like these is to make us feel that the individuals of our acquaintance, the people whom we see with the eyes of the flesh, are like those life-size wax figures in the foreground of panoramas, shown standing on real grass and waving walking-sticks bought in real shops, so that they seem to form part of the crowd of curious visitors, and, little by little, lead our eyes to the painted scene-cloth at the back, to which, thanks to a series of cunningly contrived transitions, they give the appearance of actuality. So it is with this Madame de Boigne—an Osmond before her marriage—who, as a child, she tells us, sat on the knees of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette. When I was a young man and went to dances, I used often to see her niece, the old Duchesse de Maillé, née Osmond, who, at well over eighty, was still a superb figure of a woman with her grey hair piled above her forehead in such a way that she looked for all the world like a bewigged and presiding judge. I remember, too, that my parents frequently dined with the nephew of Madame de Boigne, the nephew for whom she wrote her *Memoirs*, and whose photograph I discovered among their papers together with a number of letters which he had written to them. Consequently, my earliest recollections of dance-going, taken in conjunction with the slightly vaguer, though very real, things told me by my parents, are joined by a thread so tenuous as to be almost immaterial, with those memories treasured by Madame de Boigne and by her retailed to us, of the first parties at which she was ever present: the whole succession making up a woven pattern of frivolities, yet full of poetry, despite their worldliness, because the stuff is the stuff of dreams, is an airy bridge that joins the present to a past already very far away, and life to history, so that, because of it, history is made more living and life almost historical.

Alas! Here I am in the third column of my article, and I have not even made a start on it. It ought to be called 'Snobbery and Posterity', though I am not going to give it that title, because I have filled all the space allowed me without saying a single word about either Snobbery or Posterity, two characters whom you thought, no doubt, that you would never be called upon to meet—to the greater happiness of the second—and about whom I meant to make a number of comments inspired by the reading of Madame de Boigne's *Memoirs*. That will have to be for another time. And if, when that time comes, one of those ghosts appears, who are for ever slipping in between my thought and its object, soliciting my attention, and keeping me from concentrating on the task of providing you with reading-matter, I will elbow it aside, as Ulysses with his sword pushed aside the Shades that pressed about him to beg the gift either of a bodily habitation or a tomb.

Today I have been unable to resist the appeal of visions which I see floating not far beneath the transparent surface of my thought. I have tried without success to do what the master glass-blowers so admirably achieved when they transported and fixed their dreams at the precise point in space where they had seen them, between two stretches of water, troubled by reflections sombre and rosy red, in a translucent material where an occasional ray of flickering light, projected from the heart, tempted them to believe that they were still moving within an envelope of living thought. Of such a kind were those Nereids whom the sculptor of the Ancient World ravished from the sea, believing that they could still feel the water about them as they swam among the marble waves upon the bas-relief which imaged it. I was wrong. I shall not again be guilty of such an error. Next time I will speak to you, without parentheses, of Snobbery and Posterity, and if some irrelevant thought, some indiscreet fancy, wishing to mingle with what does not concern it, threatens to interrupt, I will beg it, without further temporising, to let us be. 'I was just in the middle of a conversation, Miss: please don't cut me off!'

*Le Figaro*, March 20, 1907



# ON THE THRESHOLD OF SPRING

## *WHITE MAY, PINK MAY*

I READ not long ago, in connection with this relatively mild winter—which finishes today—that, in the course of the last few centuries, the hawthorn has been known occasionally to bloom in February: and at sight of that word my heart beat faster, because it is the first flower that I ever loved.

Even today, when I look at the hawthorn blossom, I feel once more the same in age and mood as when I saw it for the first time. Whenever I catch sight of its white gauze hanging in the hedge, I become again the child that then I was. Other flowers awaken in me only the feeblest, barest, images, but the hawthorn draws strength from those far older, yet far younger, impressions which are linked to it in the manner of an accompaniment, like the fresh voices of invisible choristers who, at certain gala performances, are employed to support and give substance to the worn vocalisation of some superannuated tenor warbling a song of ancient days. If, when I see the hawthorn, I stop and brood, it is because not sight alone, but memory, and the full force of my attention, is called into play. I try to determine the nature of those depths of feeling against which the petals stand out in relief, of feeling that seems, as it were, to add a past, to add a soul, to the flower. And I try to explain to myself why it is that the blossoming thorn brings back to me the sound of singing and the vision of moonlit nights long dead.

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It was in the Month of Mary that I first saw, or, rather, first noticed, the hawthorn. Inseparable from the Mysteries in the celebration of which they participated like prayers made visible, set on the very altar between the candles and the sacred vessels, they spread their branches horizontally, row under row in festal array, their beauty heightened by great swags of green

on which was scattered a profusion of small white buds, as on a bridal veil. At a higher level the wide-open corollas seemed to conserve, as might a woman the last perfection of her shimmering finery, the odour of their stamens which spread about them a sweet-smelling mist. Striving to ape within my mind the movement of their growth, I imagined it, though not consciously, in the form of a young girl's gestures—a young girl with her thoughts elsewhere and caught up in the heedless ecstasy of living. When I knelt before the altar, before leaving the church, I could catch, as I rose from my knees, the bitter-sweet smell of almonds. Silent and motionless the blossoms stood, but this scent that came and went, was as the murmur of their urgent life. The very altar seemed to vibrate with it, and the sight of some of the stamens blushing almost to scarlet, witnesses of the Spring's bright virulence and of how the sting of insects could be metamorphosed into flowers, brought to my mind a wild, untended hedgerow made victim of antennæ deeply probing.

On these evenings of the Month of Mary, when it was fine and a moon was showing in the sky, we never went straight home. My father, eager for praise, would make a long 'round' past the Calvary, because my mother, who had no sense of direction and could never find her way alone, thought that his skill in piloting her steps betokened strategic genius of the highest order. We would return by way of the Boulevard de la Gare, where all the prettiest villas stood. In each tiny garden the moon, after the manner of Hubert Robert,<sup>1</sup> touched to a glory of white marble the shoddy steps, the fountains and the iron gates left ajar. Its light transformed the Post Office into the semblance of a broken column, and gave to it the beauty of some immortal ruin. There was no deadening quality in the silence, but through it came, clear-cut and from very far away, a symphony of sounds, scarcely perceptible, yet with each detail sharp, and so 'finished' that the distance seemed to thrill with the effect of their *pianissimo*—like those muted passages played so beautifully by the orchestra of the Conservatoire, which, as one

<sup>1</sup> A French landscape painter of the eighteenth century (*Translator*)



listens, though not one note is lost, seem to come from far beyond the concert-hall, and the old subscribers, ravished by the sound, strain to catch it, as though what they hear is the progress of a distant regiment on the march which has not yet turned the corner of the Rue de Trévis. By this time I would be dragging my feet, half dead with sleepiness, and the smell of the limes, which made the whole air fragrant, would seem like a prize which one could win only at the cost of a vast weariness, and scarcely worth the effort. Suddenly my father would call a halt and say to my mother: 'Where are we now?': and she, exhausted by the exercise, but proud of him, would tenderly confess that she had absolutely no idea. At that he would shrug his shoulders and laugh: and then, as though he had taken it from his pocket with his key, would point to where, just ahead, the backdoor of our garden stood, as though, in company with the old familiar corner of the lane, it had come to meet us at the end of our mysterious wanderings. Then, with admiration in her voice, mother would say: 'You really are an extraordinary man!'

From that point on I moved without conscious effort. The ground seemed to do my walking for me there in the garden where my every action was performed without the aid of thought. Habit took me in its arms, and carried me like a small child upstairs to bed.

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One Sunday, after luncheon, walking with my parents on a little climbing path that led into the fields, I found it humming with the scent of hawthorn. The perspective of the hedge looked like a long line of chapels hidden from sight by the mass of flowers piled upon their altars. Beneath them on the ground the sun played in a pattern of chequered light as though it were shining through stained glass windows. The fragrance came to me as rich and as concentrated as thought I were, in very fact, before the altar of Our Lady. Each blossom, gloriously decked displayed with easy nonchalance its little bunch of shining stamens, ribbed and delicate as the flamboyant

traceries in our church, that climbed in fretted loveliness about the Rood-Screen and, on the window mullions, blossomed into a white wealth of strawberry leaves. How simple and how rustic looked, by comparison, the dog-rose sprays sprawling beside them on this warm afternoon in the country lane, enjoying the full radiance of the sun, dressed all in smooth pink silk which even the lightest breeze brought fluttering to the ground.

I stood there before the hawthorn trees, breathing in their scent. Though I strove to concentrate my mind — which knew not what to make of this experience, losing and finding again their invisible yet unchanging fragrance—though I tried to make myself one with the rhythm, the young and joyful rhythm of their branches which moved at intervals as unexpected as certain intervals of music and produced in me, with inexhaustible profusion, the same vague charm; yet I could no more plumb their meaning than that of melodies which one may hear a hundred times without ever finding the answer to their secret. I turned from them for a moment, in order that the next I might resume my gazing with faculties refreshed. I tracked on to the grass which rose steeply to the open fields, a lost and lagging poppy, a group of cornflowers loitering in the rear, which gave colour to the green in little patches like the border of a tapestry on which we see, in open arabesque, the rural theme that forms the panel's subject. Scattered and widely spaced, like isolated houses announcing the proximity of a village, they heralded for me the vast extent of stretching cornland crowned with fleecy clouds, and the sight of a single poppy hoisting to the fine-spun rigging of its mast-head, and letting stream before the wind, its flames of scarlet set above a black and slimy buoy, made my heart beat like the wayfarer's who, glimpsing beyond the level plain a stranded ship with caulkers hard at work, cries, before ever it comes in view, 'The sea!'

Then I went back and stood before the hawthorns, as before those masterpieces of art which we think we shall see more clearly if we keep our eyes from staring at them. They brought me pleasure such as we feel when we see a work of some favourite



painter different from those we know already from his brush, or when we are shown a picture of which we have known, till then, only a pencil sketch, or when a piece of music heard only on the piano, is later played to us in all the coloured splendour of an orchestral score. My grandfather, calling me and pointing to the hedge growing along the boundary of the park which we were skirting, would say: 'You're so fond of hawthorns: look at that little pink fellow, isn't he lovely?' And, sure enough, it was a thorn, but of the red variety, and far more beautiful than all the white. It, too, was dressed for festival—for one of those religious festivals which alone deserve the name, since no mere whim, as in the parties of the social world, appoints for them a day of no special relevance, with no particular feature of fairyland about it—but even more rightly dight, because the flowers, set on the branch in such a way, one above the other, that there was no space without its touch of decoration, like tufted garlands on a rococo crozier, were all 'full out', and so of a higher quality according to the æsthetic standards of the village which judged from the scale of prices that obtained in the 'general shop' where pink biscuits cost more than any other kind.

And, indeed, the colour chosen by the flowers was that of things edible, of things designed to heighten the loveliness of a grand party dress, things that, because the reason for their greater value is so obviously displayed, seem always indisputably beautiful to children, and therefore hold for them eternally a greater vividness, a truer touch of nature, than do other shades, even when it is clearly understood that they cannot be eaten, or have not been chosen deliberately by the dressmaker. I had already felt its charm, as I had that of the white thorn, and with it nothing artificial, nothing to betray the touch of human skill. The festive intention was obvious, though nature had spontaneously contrived it, giving expression to its intention with the simplicity of some village work-woman stitching at an altar cloth and overloading the greenery of leaves with rosettes of a too vivid hue and too countrified a taste. High up on the branches, looking like so many diminutive rose bushes of the

kind that on high Feast Days are set in pots and swathes of paper lace upon the altar, there to display their weakly charms, swarmed in their thousands little buds of a paler colour, which, when half opened, showed, as in a cup of faint-flushed marble, a red, by contrast, rich and deep, and exhibited, even more than the fuller blossoms, that peculiar and irresistible essence of the May which, where it burgeons and trembles on the brink of full maturity, can do so only in some variant of pink. Thus, spaced about the hedge, though as different from it as a girl in a party dress seen in a group of stay-at-homes in household drab, all ready for the Lady Mary's month, of which already it seemed to form a part, smiling and fresh in all its rosy gaiety, ecclesiastical and sweet, the hawthorn grew.

That year my parents had arranged that we should leave for Paris earlier than usual. On the morning of departure, I, who was to have my photograph taken with hair all neatly curled, a new hat, till then not worn, set gingerly upon my head, and dressed in girlish velvet, was nowhere to be found. My mother sought me high and low, and found me finally in tears upon this same steep path, saying farewell to all my hawthorn trees, my arms about their spiky trunks, and—like a tragedy princess, weighed down with useless finery, guilty of base ingratitude to the importunate hands, which, with such care, had tied my knots and arranged my locks upon my forehead—treading under foot new hat and curl-papers alike. My mother was not softened by my tears. She could not repress a cry at sight of the battered hat and ruined velvet . . . I did not hear her. 'Dear, darling hawthorns, it is not you'—I sobbed—'who want to make me miserable and are sending me away! You have never caused me pain, and therefore I shall love you always!' Then, drying my eyes, I promised them that when I had grown up, I would not do as foolish men, but, even in Paris, would, when the Spring returned, instead of paying calls and listening to silly talk, go to the country to see the earliest May.

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## SUNLIGHT ON A BALCONY

I HAVE just drawn the curtain. On the balcony the sun has set its comfortable cushions. I shall not go out. These sunbeams hold for me no promise of delight. Why, then, should the sight of them stroke me with gentle fingers, as of some hope, some empty hope, a hope devoid of object, yet, in its essence, a hope both shy and tender?

When I was twelve years old I used to play in the Champs Elysées with a little girl whom I loved, whom I have never seen since, who married and is now the mother of a family, whose name I read the other day in a list of subscribers to the *Figaro*. But because I did not know her parents I could never see her except in the Champs Elysées. She did not come there every day because of lessons, confirmation classes, invitations to tea, visits to the theatre, expeditions with her mother—because, in short, of a whole life of which I knew nothing, of a life filled for me with melancholy charm because it was hers, and because it separated her from me. As soon as I had made sure she would not come, I used to drag my governess on a pilgrimage to the house where my little friend lived with her parents. So deep was my passion for her, that if I saw the old butler come out to exercise the dog, I turned pale and strove in vain to still the beating of my heart. Her parents produced on me an even more powerful impression. Their very existence was, to my mind, a proof that the world held something of the supernatural, and when I learned that there was a Paris street where my sweetheart's father might sometimes be seen on his way to the dentist, it seemed to me as full of marvels as to a peasant might some road said to be haunted by the fairies, and often I would spend long hours there, waiting.

At home my only pleasure was, by subterfuge, to make someone speak her Christian or her surname, or at least mention the name of the street where she lived. Not that I didn't ceaselessly repeat them to myself, but that I had to hear their lovely sounds, and have played to me the music which it was not enough for me to read in silence. But because my parents

lacked that extra sense, that flash of instinct, which is the gift of love, and thanks to which I could see in all that concerned this little girl delight and mystery, they found my conversation inexplicably monotonous. They feared that I might grow into a stupid man, and—because I hunched my shoulders in an effort to look like her father—that I might become deformed, a fate still worse.

Sometimes the usual hour of her arrival at the Champs Élysées would pass without her putting in an appearance. I would just be growing desperate when, shot from a point midway between the wooden horses and the Punch and Judy show, the late but welcome vision of her governess's purple feather would strike like a bullet to my heart. We played together, nor did we interrupt our games except to go to the neighbouring booth where my little friend bought fruit and barley-sugar. Because she was fond of natural history, she chose of the former such examples as might contain maggots. I, for my part, gazed, lost in admiration, at the agate marbles, luminous and imprisoned in a wooden bowl apart, which I valued because they were fair and smiling as young girls, and because they cost fifty centimes each.

My little friend's governess wore a mackintosh. Alas! no matter how hard I begged, my parents would no more consent to let me have one too, than they would have considered giving me a purple feather. Unfortunately, this governess was terrified of damp, and of the effect it might have on her. When the weather, even in January, was set fair, I knew that I should see my beloved, and if, when I went first thing to say good-morning to my mother, I saw a column of dust hang motionless above the piano, and heard a barrel organ beneath the window playing *En Revenant de la Revue*, I knew that, until the evening, the winter would receive the glorious, the unexpected visit of a day of Spring. If, down the whole length of the street, I saw the balconies all loosened by the sun, so that they seemed to float before the houses like golden clouds, I was happy. But there were other days when the weather was uncertain, though my parents said that the clouds might break, that it only needed the sun to come through, but that more



probably we should have rain. And if it rained, what was the point in my going to the Champs Elysées? So, from luncheon on, I kept my eyes glued to the overcast and treacherous sky of afternoon. Dark it remained. In front of the window the balcony was grey.

Then suddenly, I caught on a dun-coloured stone, not so much a brightness as a hint of something that made me feel as though a brighter colour were about to show, something that was the throb of a still uncertain beam striving to liberate its brightness. A moment later, and the balcony turned pale like water in the morning light. Shadows of the iron railing showed on its surface. A gust of wind dispersed them, and, once again, the stone went dark. But, as though tamed, they came once more: once more the stone grew paler, and, one of those long-held crescendos which, in music, at the end of an overture, lift a single note to its ultimate *fortissimo* after taking it rapidly through all the intervening modulations, I saw it assume the golden glow, unalterable and fixed, of fine weather, so that the shadow of the wrought iron-work of the balustrade showed black, a pattern of fanciful vegetation, with a fine-drawn delicacy in every tiniest detail, which seemed to tell of an artist's conscientious hand working to please itself, and so clear-cut, with such velvet shadows in the repose of the dark and pleasing masses, that in truth the broad and leafy images thus mirrored in a lake of sunlight, seemed to display a guarantee of calm and happiness.

For that momentary shadow—play of ivy—so sprawling and fugitive, so sad, so colourless, so wholly at the mercy of the plants that climb on walls and hang festooned on window frames; and yet, to me, unutterably dear ever since the day when it showed upon the balcony like the ghostly presence of that little girl who might already have reached the Champs Elysées, and, as soon as I arrived, would say: 'Let's start right away: I've chosen you to be on *my* side!'; fragile, likely to be blown away by any gust of wind, but, all the same, in keeping, if not with the season, with the hour at least, holding a promise of immediate joys which the day might carry to perfection or might refuse, and so of that best of all joys, love; sweeter and

warmer on the stone than any covering of moss, perennial, needing but a single ray of sunlight to bring it into life and happy bloom, even in the depth of winter when other vegetation shows no sign, when the lovely pelt of green on ancient trunks is hidden under snow, and, when there is snow upon the balcony—that shadow play will, with the sudden coming of the sun, set there before me a net of twisted golden threads, an embroidered pattern of reflected black.

But a day comes when life no longer brings us happiness. And then the light, with which past happiness was mingled, will give it back to us, the light of that sun which, after long years, we have learned to adorn with human attributes, though now it is for us but a memory of joy long vanished. In the fresh shimmer of its gold it lets us taste again happiness that was, and, in the past which it recalls for us, or, rather, somewhere between this present and that past, and out of time, gives to us a pleasure that no time can touch. If poets, in an effort to paint for us the image of a Heaven where delight shall be unending, make it, as a rule, so boring, that is because, instead of searching in their own experience for all the little and inimitable things that gave delight to them, they bathe their scene in dazzling radiance and fill it with a wealth of unknown scents. No suns nor scents are so delicious to us as those imprinted in our memories; for they can make us hear again the far, faint music that was emotion's gift; emotion that seems the more original now that the changes in our minds and nerves, often so hard to recognise yet working ceaselessly within us, have left it far behind. It only—and not the fatuous radiance or new-fangled scents (things alien to our lives) can give us back a little of that air of yesterday which we shall never wholly breathe again; can conjure up a vision of the one true Heaven, the Heaven we have lost! And so, perhaps because of that little 'Scene of Childhood' which I have just recalled, I found, just now, in the sun that struck upon the balcony, in the sun that holds in concentrated essence all my Heaven, a touch of fantasy, of sadness and caress, as in a phrase by Schumann.

*Le Figaro*, June, 1912



## EASTER HOLIDAYS

NOVELISTS are fools who reckon time by days and years. Days may, for a clock, be of equal length, but not for men. One day is steep and wearisome, and takes infinity to climb: another has a gentle gradient down which we sing our way full-speed. There are some natures, high-strung sensitive natures in particular, that need an equipment of changeable gears, like motor cars, if they are to face their journey through the years with confidence. There are days, too, that come out of due order, that seem to have been interpolated in the calendar, to have strayed from their proper season with weather not their own. One is, let us say, in Paris: the time is winter; yet, lying there in a half sleep one has the feeling that the day about to break will be Sicilian and coloured like the Spring. The very sound of the trams tells one that it is not fated to be drowned in rain, but lies at its moorings, ready to sail into the blue. A thousand themes of common-or-garden life, scored for various instruments, ranging from the plumber's horn to the goatherd's pipe, orchestrate the morning air as for some *Overture to a Day of Festival*. At the first touch of the sun one starts to sing, like the statue of Memnon. But even without a change of temperature one's sensibilities, one's world of inner music, can move to an altered tempo.

Names, the names of cities and the names of countries—like those scientific instruments that make it possible to produce at will phenomena which, in nature, appear only at rare and irregular intervals—bring to us mist and sunshine and blown spray.

Often a sequence of days which, seen objectively, are like all other days, differ from one another as sharply as does one melody from another. To catalogue events is like getting to know an opera from the libretto only. If I were writing a novel I should try to differentiate the music of successive days.

I remember how, when I was a child, my father decided,

one year, that we should spend the Easter holidays in Florence. What a vast difference lies between *names* and *words*! Little by little, as life goes on, names become mere words. We discover that a town called Quimperlé and one called Vannes, a man called Joinville and one called Vallombreuse, may differ much less in fact than they do in name. But, for a long time, those names have a way of setting us on a false scent. Words show us a diminutive, commonplace and clear-cut picture of things, like the charts which we see hung on schoolroom walls to demonstrate the nature of a bench, a sheep, a hat—each being conceived as identical in appearance with every other instance of the same species. But a name makes us believe that the city it denotes is a person, that between one city and another there lies a gulf.

The picture thus presented is necessarily simplified. A name covers no great extent. We cannot force it to hold much of duration or of space—no more, perhaps, than a single monument, seen always in the same light. Florence, in my imagination, was divided at most into two compartments, resembling, in that, those paintings by Ghirlandaio where the same character is shown performing two separate actions. In one of these compartments I could see, from beneath an architectural canopy, through a curtain formed by the light of a sun striking obliquely, along a perspective formed by the pictures of Santa Maria dei Fiori. In the other, I was in the act of going home to lunch across a Ponte Vecchio piled high with jonquils, narcissi and anemones.

But the picture of a town which we conjure up by the mere study of its name, is by that name wholly conditioned; by the sharp or brilliant or sombre tone, it sounds; bathing it wholly in its radiance, as in those posters printed in one colour only, blue or red, where ships and churches, passers-by and roads are all, equally, blue or red; where even the tiniest cottages of Vitré seem darkened by its acute accent. Thus to me did the houses of Florence look, as though they must be drenched in perfume like so many flowers, perhaps because of the implication of that name—Santa Maria dei Fiori. Had I



been more attentive to my thoughts, I should have realised that whenever I said to myself 'I am going to Florence', or 'I shall be in Florence', what I saw in imagination was not a city, but something as entirely different from anything I know, as would be, for people who had spent their lives in the fag-ends of winter afternoons, the strange new marvel of a day of spring.

I am convinced that one of the tasks of the talented is to restore the tints of life and of nature to those sentiments that literature has surrounded with conventional splendours. Not the least of my reasons for admiring Paul Claudel's *l'Annonce faite à Marie*—those who go into ecstasies before the glory of the sculptured tympanum should know how to appreciate the delicate detail of a tracery—is that his shepherds on Christmas night, cry, not 'Glory to God in the highest, behold our Redeemer!' but 'B-r-r, it dü stroike co-o-ld!', and that Violaine, when she brings the child back to life, says 'Drink up, my pet'. In the superb works of that great poet Francis Jammes, I could find many another example in this kind. But, inversely, the office of literature may well be, in other cases, to substitute a more exact phrase for the excessively vague expressions by which we try to give form to those feelings which possess us so completely that we fail to have any clear idea of them. I could express the delicious state of excitement which the thought of going to Florence woke in me, only by stopping at least ten times while I was dressing to sing at the top of my voice *Le Père la Victoire*. But what my excitement most truly resembled was that which animates the true believer who knows that he is at the gate of Paradise.

The winter seemed to be beginning all over again. My father said that we couldn't possibly start on a journey in such weather. It was just the time when, in other years, we should be arriving at a small town of La Beauce, to find the violets blue and the world's warmth rekindled. But this year my longing for a holiday in Florence had effaced the memory of other holidays spent near Chartres. At all the moments of life our attention is far more concentrated on what we hope to have than on what,

in fact, lies there before us. Could we analyse the sensations that assail the eyes and nose of a man who, on a broiling day of June, goes home to dinner, we should find that they comprised, not so much the smell of the dusty road beneath his feet, and the dazzle of the shop-signs he is passing, as the sweet scents lying ahead—fragrance of cherry jam and apricots, of cider and Gruyère cheese—held in suspension in the rich, shiny and translucent shadows of the dining room, veining it delicately like the inside of an agate, with the knife-rests of prismatic glass twinkling like little broken rainbows, or glowing here and there like the eyes in a peacock's tail. Similarly, it was Florence, and the flowers piled high for sale on the Ponte Vecchio that I saw, while, on a day more bitterly cold than had ever been known in January, I crossed the Boulevard des Italiens where, in the air that was as liquid and as icy as water, the chestnuts, all the same, were just beginning—guests punctual to the moment, and already in their party clothes—undeterred by the bad weather, to round and shape, out of its frozen mass, that irresistible green which the abortive power of cold may irk but cannot check.

No sooner had I got home than I settled down to read books about Florence—though not, at that time, those by Messieurs Henri Ghéon and Valéry Larbaud, because the N.R.F. would not be born for several more years. But the volumes stirred me less than the simple Guides, and the Guides less than the Railway Timetable. What most exercised my mind was how, by what roundabout and devious ways, I could ever actually *reach* that city of Florence which I could see so close at hand, yet so inaccessible, in my imagination. I could not, therefore, contain myself when my father, while deploring the cold, began to look up the trains and decide which would be the best: when I realised that if we plunged, after luncheon, into the smoky cavern, the glazed laboratory, of the station, and climbed into the magic train which would undertake to transmute the scene around us, we could wake next morning at the foot of the hills where stands Fiesole, and in the City of Lilies. 'Actually', said my father, 'you can easily be in Florence on the 29th, or



perhaps, even, on the morning of Easter Day.' With these words he made Florence emerge, not simply, as heretofore, from abstract Space, but from that Time of the imagination in which we situate, not a single country holiday, but all holidays that ever were, in a sort of concentrated confusion, and so brought it within the focus of a real, a particular week of my life (the week beginning on a certain Monday) when the laundress was due to return the white waistcoat which I had stained with ink; a commonplace but *actual* week that bore one meaning only. And it was borne in upon me that, by making use of the most exciting of all the many varieties of geometry, I was about to inscribe on the plane of my own personal life the domes and belfries of the City of Flowers.

The peak of happiness was attained when my father said to me: 'The evenings may still be cold down on the Arno: better pack your winter overcoat and a heavy suit.'

For only then did I feel that it was really *I* who, on Easter Eve, would be walking through a city which I imagined to be inhabited solely by men of the Renaissance; that it was *I* who would enter its churches where, looking at the background of Fra Angelico's pictures one gets the impression that the sunny afternoon has crossed the threshold with the visitor, to refresh its blue skies in the cool shadows of the interior. I felt that at last I had really got inside that *name* of 'Florence'—a thing that, till then, I had thought to be impossible. By a supreme feat of acrobatics—quite beyond my normal powers to achieve—I had shaken myself free, as from some now useless carapace, of the atmosphere of what, in actual material fact, had been my room but was my room no longer, because I had substituted for it an equal number of particles of Florentine air, of an indescribable and special atmosphere such as one breathes in dreams, and which I had locked away in that name of 'Florence'. I felt miraculously as though I had become discarnate. But with that feeling came another, the kind of discomfort bred of a sore throat. That evening I went to bed with a temperature: the doctor set a veto on our journey, and all my plans were reduced to nothing.

But not altogether. For during the Lent of the following year, it was the memory of them that gave an especial flavour to my days, and imparted to them a sense of harmony. Hearing a lady remark: 'I shall have to take to my furs again. It really is most unseasonable weather. Who would ever think that Easter was so near? It's more like the beginning of winter', I became aware of a sudden sensation of Spring. The same melodic motif reappeared that had cast a spell over those same weeks a year ago, so that what I felt was, in some sense, a reminiscence of them. If I wanted to find a musical equivalent for that experience, I should say that it had the fragrant, the delicious and fragile delicacy of the theme that tells of convalescence and of roses in the *Fervaal* of Monsieur d'Indy. The dreams that we enclose in names remain intact so long as we keep those names hermetically sealed, so long as we do not travel. But as soon as we break through the magic circle, no matter how little, as soon as we actually arrive in the city, the very first tram we see drives into the very heart of them, and our memory of it remains for ever inseparable from the façade of Santa Maria Novella.

A year ago I had suspected that Easter Day was no different from other days, that it had no notion that 'Easter' was its name, and in the windy gusts I thought I recognised the sweetness I had felt before—the rooted solidity, the familiar damp, the ignorant fluidity of former days. But I could not prevent the memory of those plans that I had made in the year now gone from imparting to Easter week a Florentine quality, or to Florence itself a touch of Eastertide. Easter week was still far away, but in the vista of the time that lay ahead the Saints' Days stood out more clearly than usual, touched by a ray of sunlight like certain houses in a distant village which one sees in a confusion of light and shadow, concentrating upon themselves every scrap of sunshine. Like that city off the coast of Brittany which, at particular seasons, rises from the depths in which it lies engulfed, so Florence rose again for me. Everyone was complaining of the bad weather, of the cold. But as I lay in a languor of convalescence, the sun that must be



## EASTER HOLIDAYS

shining on the fields of Fiesole made me blink my eyes and smile. Not only had the bells of Italy come here to me, but Italy herself. No flowers were lacking to my faithful hands with which to deck the anniversary of a journey I had never made. For, ever since the weather had turned cold about the chestnuts and the plane trees of the Boulevard, in the frozen air that washed about their trunks, as in a bowl of purest water, the jonquils, the hyacinths and the anemones, of the Ponte Vecchio had been opening.

*Le Figaro*, March 25, 1913

## THE VILLAGE CHURCH

THE admirable author of the true *Génie de Christianisme*—I means Maurice Barrès—will, I do not doubt, hear his appeal for all our village churches echoed increasingly. For this is the moment when many of us resume contact with our own. Even in the hearts of those who do not plan to spend their holidays in the places where they grew to manhood, the memories of the season will revive that time when, every year, they used to go for relaxation to rest awhile within the shadow of their church.

From very far off one could see the belfry that belonged to ours. Its unmistakeable shape was etched upon the sky. When, from the train that was bringing us from Paris, my father saw it point in turn down all the tracks of Heaven, twirling its little metal weather-cock to every point of the compass, he would say: 'Get the things together: we shall be there in a moment': and on one of the longer walks that we used to take near our little town, at a spot where a narrow lane debouches into a vast and spreading upland, he would point to where, in the distance, the sharp steeple stood up in isolation from the flatness of the landscape, so elegant, so pink, that it seemed as though scratched upon the sky by the thumbnail of someone who wished to give to the scene, to the upland where all was nature unadorned, this one little touch of art, this unique indication of man's handiwork.

As one drew near and could see the remains of the half-ruined square tower which still stood beside it, one was struck, more especially, by the dark and reddish colour of the stones. On a misty Autumn morning, rising above the stormy violet of the vineyards, it looked like a ruin of purple granite, having almost the same tint as the ungathered grapes.

From the distance it was just an isolated church, a symbol of the town, its spokesman to the endless miles. But, as one drew nearer, one could see how it spread its sombre mantle, there in the open fields, like a shepherd shielding his flocks against the wind, round the grey and woolly houses huddled at its foot.



## THE VILLAGE CHURCH

How well I knew that church of ours, that familiar companion of my days! Seen from the street, on to which its main door opened, it formed a bulkhead between the house where the chemist lived and the grocer's shop. We regarded it as just one of our neighbours. As a building it might well have had a number, if the street of this little country town had boasted such things as numbers: nor should we have been surprised to see the postman include it in his rounds, and go in by its door after leaving the grocer and before coming to the chemist. But, for all that, there was between it and everything else in the place, a line of demarcation which my imagination could not cross. It was all very well for the fuchsias next door—which had the bad habit of drooping here, there and everywhere—to seek, when they had nothing better to do, a little coolness for their violet and congested faces in the shadow of its gloomy walls, *that* did not give to them a character of sanctity. For if to my eyes there was no visible separation between them and the dark stones against which they leaned, in my mind there was a great gulf fixed.

The angles of the ancient porch, pitted like a skimmer, were smoothed away and hollowed (as was the holy water stoup within) as though the gentle brushing of generations of countrywomen entering and dipping their fingers, had, through the centuries, acquired a power of destruction, and had carved in the long-suffering flint furrows like those made by waggons on a milestone against which they daily bump. The very tombstones that covered the dust of learned Abbots buried there, made a sort of spiritual pavement for the Choir. But they had long since lost the quality of hard and inert matter, for time had softened them in such a way that they had run like honey, overflowing with their golden sweetness the limits of their squared and proper forms, here drawing out at random a flowered Gothic capital letter, there compressing an abbreviated Latin inscription, introducing an additional caprice into the arrangement of the shortened wording, crowding the letters of a sentence of which the rest were stretched immoderately.

The stained glass windows never glowed so brightly as on

dull days when there was no sun, so that, no matter how grey the day outside might be, within there was fine weather. One, I remember, was filled by a single figure of huge size, a sort of playing-card king, who lived his life hung between Heaven and earth. Another showed a mountain of pink snow, at the foot of which a battle was in progress. The cold of that pictured winter seemed to have frosted the very glass and battered it with hail, so that it looked like a window darkened by flakes, though flakes illuminated by the light of dawn; (the same, no doubt, as that which flushed the reredos with tints so bright that they seemed to be the product of a fleeting radiance, rather than pigments laid upon the stone to last for ever). And all were so ancient that here and there the dust of centuries gave to their age a silvery sparkle, and the soft pattern of the glass looked like embroidery worn to the thread. In the Sacristy were two pieces of high-warped tapestry representing the crowning of Esther, to which the running of their colours had imparted a peculiar liveliness, luminosity and three-dimensional quality. Some of the pink on Esther's lips had spread beyond their containing lines, and her dress showed so unctuous, so rich a yellow that it had taken on a sort of solidity and stood out vividly in the lowered tone of the general composition, in contrast to the green of the trees which, though still bright in the lower part of the silken panel, had faded in the top half to a paler tone above the dark trunks and yellowing branches which had a golden look, as though half effaced by the sharp radiance cast on them obliquely by an invisible sun.

All these ancient things combined to make the church, for me, into something that was entirely different from the rest of the village, a building, if I may so put it, occupying a four-dimensional space—the fourth dimension being that of Time; into a great ship sailing across the centuries, and seeming, from span to span, from chapel to chapel, to have conquered and overleapt not only a few yards of ground, but successive epochs above which it towered victorious, concealing in the thickness of its walls the crudity and ferocity of the eleventh century whose blunt, round-headed arches, half masked by massive



## THE VILLAGE CHURCH

ashlar, showed only in the deep recess which was made, close to the doorway, by the stairway to the tower, and was even there disguised by graceful Gothic screens which pressed forward with a coquettish air like elder sisters stepping in front of an uncouth younger brother, ill-clad and badly mannered, to keep him from the prying eyes of strangers. Above the Square, and pointing to the sky, was the steeple that had seen St Louis, and seemed to see him still.

From the windows of the tower, set in pairs, one above the other—with that true and original proportion in their spacing which gives beauty and dignity only to human faces—the old building loosed and let fall, at regular intervals, great flights of rooks who, for a moment, circled and cawed as though the ancient stones which had set them gambolling without seeming to notice them, had become uninhabitable, and, spreading about themselves a principle of infinite tumult, had repelled, had driven off, the birds. These, after streaking in every direction the violet velvet of the evening air, grew suddenly calm, and returned, to be absorbed once more into the tower, which, from being ominous, had once again turned hospitable, some perching here and there, and seeming not to move, though maybe snapping at some insect, on the extreme edge of a turret, like gulls struck to the immobility of fishermen on the waves' crests.

Often, as I passed the tower on my way home from a walk, and gazed at the gentle tension, the ardent slope of its stones, which drew together as they rose, like hands joined in prayer, I felt myself made so utterly one with the leaping movement of the spire, that it was as though my eyes jumped skywards with its thrust; and I would give a smile to the old, worn stones which caught the setting sun only at the summit, and, from the moment that they encroached upon that sunlit zone, were softened by the light, seeming to have climbed still further upward, like an air recapitulated by a 'head voice' an octave higher than the normal.

The second porch on this side was completely covered with ivy, so that, in order to recognise a 'church in all the solid

mass of greenery, to realise that the semicircle of a tuft of creeper was really the top of a window, or that a projection of the leaves was caused by the heavy carving of a capital, I had to make an effort which resulted (as, when reading a translation or a written exercise, one drives deeper into a thought, if only because it is stripped of its habitual form) in making me still more sharply aware of the ecclesiastical nature of the building. But suddenly a gust of wind would set the foliage rustling, and the whole vegetable covering, set a-tremble, seemed to involve in movement the very pillars themselves, rippling, impermanent, and caressed by the moving breeze.

It was the tower of our church that gave to all employments and to every hour, to all the many aspects from which the town might be viewed, their proper shape, their crowning glory, their consecration. From my window I could see only its base which, in more recent times, had been hung with tiles. But when, on Sundays, still abed in the warm summer morning, I saw them glitter like black sunlight, I would say to myself: 'Nine o'clock already: I must get up quickly if I am to be in time for Mass!', and knew precisely the colour of the sun upon the Square, the shadow made by the awning of the shop, the heat and dust of the market.

If, after Mass, I went to ask the beadle to bring round a larger cake than usual, because friends, taking advantage of the fine weather, had come to luncheon, I saw the tower in front of me, gilded and baked brown like an outsize loaf of sacramental bread, dripping gummy scales and drops of sun, and thrusting its sharp spire into the blue sky. In the evening, on the other hand, when I came in from my walk, it looked so soft in the failing light of the day's end, that it had the air of a cushion of brown velvet set against, pressed down upon, the pale sky which seemed, as it were, to yield beneath the weight, and to have become faintly indented in order to make room for it, and to be bulging up on either side. Then the crying of the birds that swept about it had the effect of deepening the silence, and it appeared to thrust its spire still higher, and the effect of the whole building was such as no words could describe.



## THE VILLAGE CHURCH

Even when duty took me to the other side of the church, where the main mass of the fabric was no longer visible, everything seemed to be arranged with reference to the tower which rose, now here, now there, between the houses, more thrilling, perhaps, when divorced from its parent church. It was not alone, to be sure, in having its beauty thus enhanced by being seen in this way, and my memory is full of little etched studies of towers rearing their height above the neighbouring roofs, which have all the character of art.

I shall never forget, in a queer old Norman city, two charming eighteenth-century mansions which are, to me, for many reasons, dear and venerable. Between them, when looked at from the lovely garden whose lawns slope to the river, a Gothic spire, which from other aspects they conceal, becomes visible, so that it seems to crown and overlook their frontages, but in a way so different, so precious, so whorled, so pink, so shiny, that it is at once apparent that it can belong only to a shingly beach where it shows as the flushed and crenelated spike of some seashell twisted to the form of a turret, and overlaid with enamel.

Even in Paris, in one of the ugliest parts of the city, I know a window from which, behind a foreground of crowded roofs and streets, one sees a tower washed violet, or sometimes reddish, and sometimes, too, in the best 'pulls' (achieved by the effect of weather) black, like the colour of spilled ashes, which is none other than the top of the church of Saint-Augustin. It gives to this particular view of Paris the character of certain engravings of Rome done by Piranesi. But none of these little 'prints', no matter with what taste and feeling my memory has been able to execute them, so rules the deepest movement of my heart as does the memory of 'our' steeple seen from the streets behind the church. Whether I saw it at five o'clock when I went for letters to the post office which was in one of the buildings a little to its left, as a sudden isolated peak overlooking the line of roofs, or whether, pushing further afield towards the station, I caught it sideways displaying an unaccustomed vista of its steeps, like an unexpected and

surprising mass seen unawares at the moment of its veering, my attention was always brought back to it. It always dominated the scene, summoning from an unsuspected pinnacle the houses to do homage, rising there before me like the finger of God. Hidden though the body of the church might be in the chaos of human lives beneath, I was never tempted to confuse it with them.

And even today, if in some great provincial city, or in some part of Paris with which I am unfamiliar, a passer-by who has 'set me on my way', gives me as a landmark some distant belfry of a hospice, some monastery tower lifting the tip of its religious hat at the corner of the street I ought to take, no matter how little I find it, when compared with memory, reminiscent of that dear and distant image, he will, turning perhaps, to make sure that I have not gone wrong, see with amazement that, forgetful of the purpose of my walk, of the point I had set out to reach, I am still rooted there before the tower, trying to remember, aware, deep within myself, of lands recovered from the depths of oblivion, cast high and dry upon the shores of the present, and built anew from the ruins of the past. More anxious then than ever I was when I asked my way, I seek it still. I turn a corner . . . but the corner lies within my heart.

*Le Figaro*, September 3, 1913



## FILIAL SENTIMENTS OF A PARRICIDE

WHEN, some months ago, Monsieur Van Blarenberghe died, I remembered that my mother had know his wife very well. Ever since the death of my parents, I have become (in a sense which this is not the place to discuss) less myself and more their son. Though I have not turned my back on my own friends, I very much prefer to cultivate theirs, and the letters which I write now are, for the most part, those I think they would have written, those they can no longer write. I write, in their stead, letters of congratulation, letters, especially, of condolence, addressed to friends of theirs whom I scarcely know. When, therefore, Madame Van Blarenberghe lost her husband, I wanted her to receive some small token of the sadness which my parents would have felt. I remembered that, many years before, I had occasionally met her son at the houses of mutual friends. It was to him, now, that I wrote, but in the name, so to speak, of my vanished parents rather than in my own. I received the following reply. It was a beautiful letter, eloquent of filial affection. I feel that such a piece of evidence, in view of the significance which it assumes in the light of the drama which followed so hard upon its heels, and of the light which it throws upon that drama, ought to be made public. Here it is:

Les Timbrieux, par Josselin

(Morbihan)

September 24, 1904

My Dear Sir,

It is a matter of regret to me that I have been so long in thanking you for your sympathy in my great sorrow. I trust that you will forgive me. So crushing has been my loss that, on the advice of my doctors, I have spent the last four months in travelling. It is only now, and with extreme difficulty, that I am beginning to resume my former way of life.

However dilatory I may have been, I should like you to know that I deeply appreciate your remembering our former pleasant relations, and that I am touched by the impulse that led you to write to me—and to my mother—in the name of those parents who have been so untimely taken from you. I never had the honour of knowing them, except very slightly, but I am aware how warmly my father felt for yours, and how pleased my mother always was to see Madame Proust. It shows great delicacy and sensibility on your part thus to convey to me a message from beyond the grave.

I shall shortly be back in Paris, and if, between now and then, I can overcome that desire to be left to myself which, up to the present, I have felt as the result of the disappearance of one in whom my whole life was centred, and who was the source of all my happiness, it will give me much pleasure to shake your hand and talk with you about the past.

Yours, most sincerely,

H. Van Blarenberghe

I was much touched by this letter. I felt full of pity for a man who was suffering so acutely—of pity, and of envy. He still had a mother left to him, and in consoling her could find consolation for himself. If I could not respond to the efforts he wished to make to bring about a meeting, it was because of purely material difficulties. But, more than anything else, his letter made pleasanter the memories I had of him. The happy relationship to which he referred had, as a matter of fact, been the most ordinary of social contacts. I had had few opportunities of talking to him when we had happened to meet one another at dinners, but the intellectual distinction of our hosts had been, and still was, a guarantee that Henri Van Blarenberghe, beneath an appearance that was slightly conventional, and representative more of the circle in which he moved than of his own personality, concealed an original and lively nature. Among the strange snapshots of memory which our brains, so small and



yet so vast, collect by the thousand, the one that is clearest to me when I rummage among those in which Henri Van Blarenberghe appears, is that of a smiling face, and of the curious amused look he had, with mouth hanging half open, when he had discharged a witty repartee. It is thus that I, as one so rightly says 'see' him, always charming, always moderately distinguished. Our eyes play a greater part than we are prepared to admit in that active exploration of the past to which we give the name of memory. If, when someone is scrutinising an incident of his past in an endeavour to fix it, to make it once again a living reality, we look at his eyes as he tries to recollect, we see that they are emptied of all consciousness of what is going on around him, of the scene which, but a moment earlier, they reflected. 'You're not there at all,' we say: 'you're far away.' Yet, what we see is but the reverse side of what is going on within his mind. At such moments the loveliest eyes in all the world are powerless to move us by their beauty, are no more—to misinterpret a phrase of Wells,—than 'Time Machines', than telescopes focussed upon the invisible, which see further the older we grow. When we watch the rusted gaze of old men wearied by the effort to adapt themselves to the conditions of a time so different from their own, grow blind in an effort to remember, we feel, with extraordinary certainty, that the trajectory of their glance, passing over life's shadowed failures, will come to earth not some few feet in front of them—as they think—but, in reality, fifty or sixty years behind. I remember how the charming eyes of Princesse Mathilde took on a more than ordinary beauty when they became fixed on some image which had come unbidden to the retina when, in memory, she saw this or that great man, this or that great spectacle dating back to the early years of the century. It was *that* she saw: something we shall never see. At such moments, when my glance met hers, I got a vivid impression of the supernatural, because with a curious and mysterious near-sightedness, and as the result of an act of resurrection, she was linking past and present.

Charming and moderately distinguished. Those are the words

I used when thinking back to my memories of him. But after his letter had come I put a few added touches to the picture thus preserved, interpreting as evidence of a deeper sensibility, of a less wholly 'social' mentality, certain ways he had of looking, certain characteristics, which might lend themselves to a more interesting, a more generous 'reading' than the one I had at first accorded him.

When, somewhat later, I asked him to tell me about one of the staff of the Eastern Railway (Monsieur Van Blarenberghe was Chairman of the Board) in whom a friend of mine was taking an interest, I received the following reply. It had been written on the 12th of last January, but, in consequence of my having changed my address, unknown to him, did not reach me until the 17th, that is to say, not a fortnight, barely eight days, before the date of the drama.

48, Rue de la Bienfaisance

January 12, 1907

Dear Sir,

Thinking it possible that the man X . . . might still be employed by the Eastern Railway Company, I have made enquiries at their offices, and have asked them to let me know where he may be found. Nothing is known of him. If you have the name right, its owner has disappeared, leaving no trace. I gather that he was, in any case, only temporarily in their employ, and that he occupied a very subordinate position.

I am much disturbed by the news you give me of the state of your health ever since the premature and cruel death of your parents. If it is any consolation, let me tell you that I, too, have suffered physically as well as emotionally, from the shock of my father's death. But hope springs eternal . . . What the year 1907 may have in store for me I do not know, but it is my dearest wish that it may bring some alleviation to you as well as to me, and that in the course of the next few months we may be able to meet.



## SENTIMENTS OF A PARRICIDE

I should like you to know how deeply I sympathise with you.

Yours sincerely,

H. Van Blarenberghe

Five or six days after receiving this letter, I remembered, one morning on waking, that I wanted to answer it. One of those unexpected spells of cold had set in which are like the high tides of Heaven, submerging all the dykes raised by great cities between ourselves and Nature, thrusting at our closed windows, creeping into our very rooms, making us realise, when they lay a bracing touch upon our shoulders, that the elements have returned to attack in force. The days were disturbed by sudden changes in the temperature, and by violent barometric shocks. Nor did this display of Nature's powers bring any sense of joy. One bemoaned in advance the snow that was on the way, and even inanimate objects, as in André Rivoire's lovely poem, seemed to be 'waiting for the snow'. A 'depression' has only to 'advance towards the Balearics', as the newspapers put it, Jamaica has only to experience an earthquake tremor, for people in Paris who are subject to headaches, rheumatism and asthma, and probably lunatics as well, to have a crisis—so closely linked are nervous temperaments with the furthest points upon the earth's surface by bonds whose strength they must often wish was less compulsive. If the influence of the stars upon some at least of such cases be ever recognised (see Framery and Pelletean as quoted by Monsieur Brissaud) to whom could the lines of the poet be held to be more applicable:

*Et de longs fils l'unissent aux étoiles?*

No sooner was I awake than I sat down to answer Henri Van Blarenberghe. But before doing so, I wanted just to glance at *Le Figaro*, to proceed to that abominable and voluptuous act known as *reading the paper*, thanks to which all the miseries and catastrophes of the world during the past twenty-four hours—battles that have cost the lives of fifty-thousand men,

crimes, strikes, bankruptcies, fires, poisonings, suicides, divorces, the shattering emotions of statesmen and actors alike—are transmuted for our own particular use, though we are not ourselves involved, into a daily feast that seems to make a peculiarly exciting and stimulating accompaniment to the swallowing of a few mouthfuls of coffee brought in response to our summons. No sooner have we broken the fragile band that wraps *Le Figaro*, and alone separates us from all the miseries of the world, and hastily glanced at the first sensational paragraphs of which the wretchedness of so many human beings ‘forms an element’, those sensational paragraphs the contents of which we shall later retail to those who have not yet read their papers, than we feel a delightful sense of being once again in contact with that life with which, when we awoke, it seemed so useless to renew acquaintance. And if, from time to time, something like a tear starts from our gorged and glutted eyes, it is only when we come on a passage like this: ‘An impressive silence grips all hearts: the drums roll out a salute, the troops present arms, and a great shout goes up—“Vive Fallières!” . . .’ At that we weep, though a tragedy nearer home would leave us dry-eyed. Vile actors that we are who can be moved to tears only by the sorrows of Hercules, or, at a still lower level, by the State Progresses of the President of the Republic! But on this particular morning the reading of *Le Figaro* moved me to no easy responses. I had just let my fascinated eyes skim the announcements of volcanic eruptions, ministerial crises and gang-fights, and was just beginning to read a paragraph, the heading of which, ‘Drama of a Lunatic’, promised a more than usually sharp stimulus for my morning faculties, than I suddenly saw that the victim of this particular episode had been Madame Van Blarenberghe, that the murderer, who had later committed suicide, was the man whose letter lay within reach of my hand waiting to be answered. ‘*Hope springs eternal . . . What the year 1907 may have in store for me I do not know, but it is my dearest wish that it may bring some alleviation to you as well as to me . . .*’ etc. ‘*Hope springs eternal! What the year 1907 may have in store for me I do not know!*’ Well, life’s answer had



not been long delayed. 1907 had not yet dropped the first of its months into the past, and already it had brought him his present—a gun, a revolver, a dagger, and that blindness with which Athene once struck the mind of Ajax, driving him to slaughter shepherds and flocks alike on the plains of Greece, not knowing what he did. ‘I it was who set lying images before his eyes. And he rushed forth, striking to right and left, thinking it was the Atrides whom he slew, falling first on one, then on another. I it was who goaded on this man caught in the toils of a murderous madness, I who set a snare for his feet, and even now he is returned, his brow soaked in sweat, his hands reeking with blood.’ Madmen, in the fury of their onslaught, are without knowledge of what they do, but, the crisis once past, then comes agony. Tekmessa, the wife of Ajax, said: ‘His madness is diminished, his fury fallen to stillness like the breath of Motos. But now that his wits are recovered, he is tormented by a new misery, for to look on horrors for which no one but oneself has been responsible, adds bitterness to grief. Ever since he realised what has happened, he has been howling in a black agony; he who used to say that tears are unworthy of a man. He sits, not moving, uttering his cries, and I know well that he is planning against himself some dark design.’ But when with Henri Van Blarenberghe the fit had passed, it was no scene of slaughtered flocks and shepherds that he saw before him. Grief does not kill in a moment. He did not fall dead at sight of his murdered mother lying there at his feet. He did not fall dead at the sound of her dying voice, when she said, like Tolstoy’s *Princesse Andrée*: ‘Henri, what have you done to me! what have you done to me!’ . . . ‘On reaching the landing of the stairs between the first and second floors, they’, said the *Matin* (the servants who, in this account—which may not have been accurate—are represented as being in a panic, and running down into the hall four steps at a time) ‘saw Madame Van Blarenberghe, her face contorted with terror, descending the first few stairs, and heard her cry out: “Henri! Henri! what have you done”. Then the wretched woman, her head streaming with blood, threw up her arms and

fell forward on her face. The terrified servants rushed for help. Soon afterwards, four policemen, who had been summoned, forced the locked door of the murderer's room. There were dagger wounds on his body, and the left side of his face had been ripped open by a pistol shot. *One eye was hanging out on the pillow.* I thought, reading this, not of Ajax. In the 'eye hanging out on the pillow' I saw, remembering that most terrible act which the history of human suffering has ever recorded, the eye of the wretched Oedipus . . . 'and Oedipus, rushing forth with a great cry, called for a sword . . . With terrible moaning he dashed himself against the double doors, tore them from their sunken hinges, and stormed into the room where he saw Jocasta hanging from the strangling rope. Finding her thus, the wretched man groaned in horror and loosened the cord. His mother's body, no longer supported, fell to the ground. Then he snatched the golden brooches from Jocasta's dress and thrust them into his open eyes, saying that no longer should they look upon the evils he had suffered, the miseries he had caused: and, bellowing curses, he struck his staring eyes again and again, and the bleeding pupils ran down his cheeks in a rain, in a hail, of black blood. Then he cried out, bidding those who stood by to show the parricide to the race of Cadmus, urging them to drive him from the land. Ah! thus is ancient felicity given its true name. But from that day has been no dearth of all the evils that are named among men; groans and disasters, death and obloquy.' And, thinking of Henri Van Blarenberghe's torment when he saw his mother lying dead before him, I thought, too, of another wretched madman, of Lear holding in his arms the body of his daughter, Cordelia:

She's dead as earth . . .

No, no, no life.

Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life

And thou no breath at all? Thou'lt come no more,

Never, never, never, never, never . . .

Do you see this? Look on her, look, her lips,

Look there, look there!



In spite of his terrible wounds, Henri Van Blarenberghe did not die at once. I cannot but think abominably cruel (though there may have been purpose in it. Does one really know what lay behind the drama? Remember the Brothers Karamazov) the behaviour of the Police Inspector. 'The wretched man was not dead. The Inspector took him by the shoulders, and spoke to him "Can you hear me? Answer" . . . The murderer opened his one remaining eye, blinked a few times, and relapsed into a coma.' I am tempted to address to that brutal Inspector the words uttered by Kent in that same scene of *King Lear* from which I have just quoted, when he stopped Edgar from bringing Lear round from his fainting fit:

Vex not his ghost! let him pass: he hates him  
That would upon the rack of this tough world  
Stretch him out longer.

If I have dwelt upon those great names of Tragedy, Ajax and Oedipus, I wish the reader to understand why, and why, too, I have published these letters and written this essay. I want to show in what a pure, in what a religious, atmosphere of moral beauty this explosion of blood and madness could occur, and bespatter without soiling. I want to bring into the room of the crime something of the breath of Heaven, to show that what this newspaper paragraph recorded was precisely one of those Greek dramas the performance of which was almost a sacred ceremony; that the poor parricide was no criminal brute, no moral leper beyond the pale of humanity, but a noble example, a tender and a loving son whom an ineluctable fate—or, let us say, pathological, and so speak the language of today—had driven to crime, and to its expiation, in a manner that should for ever be illustrious. 'I find it difficult to believe in death', wrote Michelet in a fine passage. True, he was speaking only of a jelly-fish, about whose death—so little different from its life—there is nothing incredible, so that one is inclined to wonder whether Michelet was not merely making use of one of those hackneyed 'recipes' on which all great writers can lay their hands at need, and so serve to their customers, at short

notice, just the dish for which they have asked. But if I find no difficulty in crediting the death of a jelly-fish, I do not find it easy to believe in the death of a person, nor even in the mere eclipse, the mere toppling of his reason. Our sense of the continuity of the human consciousness is too strong. A short while since, and that mind was master of life and death, could move us to a feeling of respect; and now, both life and death have mastered it. It has become feebler than our own, which, for all its weakness, can now no longer bow before what so quickly has become almost nothing. For this, madness is to blame, madness which is like an old man's loss of his faculties, like death itself. What, the man who, only yesterday, could write the letter that I have already quoted, so high-minded and so wise, is today . . .? And even—to move for a moment to the lower level of those trivial matters which, nevertheless, are so important—the man who was so moderate and so sober in what he asked of life, who loved the little things of existence, answered a letter with such charm, was so scrupulous in doing what was demanded of him, valued the opinions of others, and wanted to appear in their eyes as someone, if not of influence, at least of easy friendliness, playing the social game so sensitively, so loyally . . . These things, I say, are very important, and, if I quoted, a while back, the first part of his second letter, which really concerned only my personal affairs, it was because the practical good-sense which it displays, seems even more at variance with what afterwards occurred than does the admirable and profound melancholy expressed in its final lines. Often, when a mind has been brought low, it is the main limbs of the tree, its top, that live on, when all the tangle of its lower branches has been eaten away by disease. In the present case, the spiritual core was left intact. I felt, as I was copying those letters, how very much I should have liked to be able to make my readers realise the extreme delicacy, nay, more—the quite incredible firmness of the hand which must have been needed to produce such neat and exquisite calligraphy.

What have you done to me! what have you done to me!



If we let ourselves think for a few moments we shall, I believe, agree that there is probably no devoted mother who could not, when her last day dawns, address the same reproach to her son. The truth is that, as we grow older, we kill the heart that loves us by reason of the cares we lay on it, by reason of that uneasy tenderness that we inspire, and keep for ever stretched upon the rack. Could we but see in the beloved body the slow work of destruction that is the product of the painful tenderness which is the mainspring of its being, could we but see the faded eyes, the hair against whose valiant blackness time had so long been powerless, now sharing in the body's general defeat and suddenly turned white; could we but see the hardened arteries, the congested kidneys, the overworked heart; could we but watch courage failing under the blows of life, the slowing movements, the heavy step, the spirit once so tireless and unconquerable, now conscious of hope gone for ever, and that former gaiety, innate and seemingly immortal, so sweet a consort for sad moments, now finally withered—perhaps, seeing all this in a flash of that lucidity now come too late, which even lives spent in a long illusion may sometimes have, as Don Quixote once had his—perhaps, then, like Henri Van Blarenberghe when he stabbed his mother to death, we should recoil before the horror of our lives, and seize the nearest gun, and make an end. In most men these painful moments of vision (even assuming they can gain the heights from which such seeing is possible) soon melt in the early beams of the sun which shines upon the joys of life. But what joy, what reason for living, what life, can stand up to the impact of such awareness? Which is true, it or the joy of life? Which of them is the Truth?

## ABOUT BAUDELAIRE

My Dear Rivière,

A serious illness has, unfortunately, made it impossible for me to provide you with, I won't say a study of Baudelaire, but even with an unpretentious article. In the absence, therefore, of anything better, I must confine myself to a few casual remarks. I regret this necessity the more, because I hold Baudelaire—together with Alfred de Vigny—to have been the greatest poet of the nineteenth century. I do not mean that if one had to choose the most beautiful *poem* of the nineteenth century one would be best advised to look for it in Baudelaire. I do not believe that in the whole extent of *Les Fleurs du Mal*, that sublime but grimacing book in which pity shows a sneering face, in which debauchery makes the sign of the Cross, where it is Satan on whom the task devolves of preaching the most profound theology, there is a single poem that is the equal of *Booz endormi*. For there, a whole epoch of history and geology is unrolled before us on a scale, and with a vigour, that nothing can contract or stop, from:

*La Terre encor mouillée et molle du Déluge*

to Jesus Christ:

*En bas un roi chantait, en haut mourait un Dieu.*

This great biblical poem (as Lucien de Rubempré would have called it “Biblical?”—said Zifine with an air of astonishment) has none of the dryness of history. It is perpetually vivified by the personality of Victor Hugo, who, in *Booz*, objectifies himself. When the poet says that women had eyes for *Booz* more than for younger men, it is because he wants to put on record his own recent successes, or to pave the way for new ones. What he is trying to do is to convince women that if they really have



taste, they will fall in love, not with a young puppy, but with an ageing bard. And it is all said in language than which none could be more free-running or more noble. Leaving aside the too often quoted lines on the eyes of a young man compared with those of an old one (with a natural preference for the latter), with what ease does Hugo, for instance, in the following couplet, subject the laws of logic to those of verse:

*Le viellard, qui revient vers sa source première  
Entre aux jours éternels et sort des jours changeants.*

A prose writer would obviously have begun with '*sort des jours changeants*'. Nor is he afraid to relegate to the very last line of a poem, where they stand out with an added nobility, such trivial phrases as:

*Laissez tomber exprès des épis, disait-il.*

From beginning to end, personal impressions, moments of experience drawn from his own life, sustain the movement of this great historical poem. It is, I am quite sure, in one of Victor Hugo's personal impressions, and not in the Bible at all, that one must seek the origin of those wonderful lines:

*Quand on est jeune on a des matins triomphants,  
Le jour sort de la nuit ainsi qu'une victoire.*

The most closely knit thoughts are given just the necessary degree of fusion:

*Voilà longtemps que celle avec qui j'ai dormi  
O Seigneur, a quitté ma couche pour la vôtre;  
Et nous sommes encor tout mêlés l'un à l'autre  
Elle à demi vivante, et moi mort à demi.*

The greatness of the style shows no sign of weakening even in such simple phrases as:

*Booz ne savait pas qu'une femme était là  
Et Ruth ne savait pas ce que Dieu voulait d'elle.<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> I purposely make no allusion here to the study—so freely conceived

With what supreme art, in those that follow, does the author convey an impression of lightness and fluidity in his repetition of the 'l' sounds:

*Les souffles de la nuit flottaient sur Galgala.*

Alfred de Vigny's method was much the same. In order to breathe an intensity of life into that other Biblical episode, the *Colère de Samson*, it was himself that Vigny dramatised in the figure of Samson, and it was because Madame Dorval's friendship for a certain type of woman filled him with jealousy that he wrote:

*La femme aura Gomorrhe et l'homme aura Sodome.*

But the superb serenity of Hugo, which made it possible for him to carry *Booz endormi* through to its final pastoral image:

*Quel Dieu, quel moissonneur de l'éternel été  
Avait, en s'en allant, négligement jeté  
Cette faucille d'or dans le champ des étoiles—*

that serenity, which ensures the majestic development of the poem, is nothing when compared with the extraordinary atmosphere of tension in Alfred de Vigny. Even in his quiet poems, Vigny remains mysterious. The source of the quietness and of its ineffable beauty, escapes us. Victor Hugo always does wonderfully what he has to do: one could not wish for greater precision in his image of the crescent moon. Even the lightest movements of the air are, as we have seen, marvellously rendered. But the fabrication—even when it is fabrication of the impalpable—is always visible: and when the moment comes when we *should* be aware of mystery, mystery is wholly absent. How, on the contrary, is it possible to say what it is precisely that conveys the sense of mystery in such lines as:

*Dans les balancements de ta taille penchée*

and so touched with humour—which Léon Daudet has recently published with such enormous and justly deserved success. That Victor Hugo was not really Booz is here beside the point. What matters is that he thought he was, or wanted others to think that he was.



*Et dans ton pur sourire amoureux et souffrant*

or:

*Pleurant comme Diane au bords de ses fontaines  
Ton amour taciturne et toujours menacé*

(four lines taken at random from Alfred de Vigny's *Maison du Berger*).

Many of the lines in Baudelaire's *Le Balcon* convey a similar impression of mystery. But mystery is not the most characteristic feature of his work. Compared with a book like *Les Fleurs du Mal* how soft, vague and unaccented seems to be the general run of Hugo's output. Hugo was for ever talking of death, but with the detachment of a great eater, a great sensualist. It may, alas! be that only when one carries consciously in the body the dull weight of death, only when, like Baudelaire, one is threatened with aphasia, can one achieve the genuine lucidity of suffering, the religious tone, which sounds in the Satanic poems:

*Il faut que le gibier paye le vieux chasseur  
. . . Avez-vous donc pu croire, hypocrites surpris,  
Qu'on se moque du maître et qu'avec lui l'on triche  
Et qu'il soit naturel de recevoir deux prix,  
D'aller au ciel et d'être riche?*

One must, perhaps, have felt the mortal weariness that is death's immediate herald, to be able to write music on that theme sweeter than any that Victor Hugo could ever have achieved:

*Et qui refait le lit des gens pauvres et nus.*

If he who wrote like that had never felt the urgent need of someone to remake his own bed, then all one can say is that such a line can only be an 'anticipation' of his unconscious mind, a presentiment of fate. Nor can I regard as final what Paul Valéry, in an admirable passage of *Eupalinos* puts into the mouth of Socrates (comparing a bust carved with conscious art to the unconscious shaping of a rock by the action of the

sea through countless centuries). 'Instructed art', says Valéry, speaking in the person of Socrates, 'shortens the processes of nature. It is safe to say that the artist is equivalent in value to a thousand, to a hundred thousand, centuries, or even longer.' To this I would reply: 'Deliberate and melodious artists may, as you maintain, represent a thousand centuries when compared to the blind working of nature, but they do not—men like Voltaire, for instance—constitute in themselves an infinity of time by comparison with an invalid, a Baudelaire, better still, a Dostoievsky, who, in thirty years, between their crises of epilepsy, or whatever, can create work of which a long line of healthy writers could not have produced a single word.'

Socrates and Valéry intruded as an interruption just as I was quoting that poem about the poor. No one has ever written of them with such genuine tenderness as did the 'Dandy' Baudelaire. A good, healthy, non-alcoholic regimen would never have sanctioned the praise of wine:

*A ton fils je rendrai la force et la vigueur  
Et serai pour ce frêle athlète de la vie  
L'huile qui raffermir les membres du lutteur.*

The poet might answer that it is not he, but the wine, that is speaking here. Be that as it may, what a divine poem: what a lovely style (*'tombe et caveau'*), what human warmth, what rapidity of line, in that picture of the vineyard!

Quite often the poet strikes a popular note. His superb lines on public concerts are well known:

*ces concerts, riches de cuivre  
Dont les soldats parfois inondent nos jardins  
Et qui par ces soirs d'or où l'on se sent revivre  
Versent quelque héroïsme au cœur de citadin.*

It would seem impossible to better that. Yet Baudelaire managed to transpose the impression a tone higher, to give it a mystic significance in the unexpected finale where the strange happiness of the elect closes a sinister poem on the subject of *Les Damnés*:



## ABOUT BAUDELAIRE

*Le son de la trompette est si délicieux  
Dans ces soirs solennels de célestes vendanges  
Qu'il s'infiltré comme une extase dans tous ceux  
Dont elle chante les louanges.*

It is permissible to believe that here the poet added to his impressions of a Parisian idler some memory of his passionate adoration of Wagner. Though the young musicians of the present day may be right (though I doubt it) in their denial of Wagner's genius, such lines as those I have just quoted are living proof that the objective precision of a writer's judgments on an art other than his own are without importance. What matters, what sets him dreaming, is the fact of his admiration, even when it may be given to what is unworthy. I have the greatest admiration for Wagner, but I remember how, when I was a child, and used to go to the Lamoureux Concerts, the enthusiasm that should have been reserved for the genuine masterpieces, *Tristan* or *Die Meistersinger*, was no less stimulated by the most insipid selections, such as 'Star of Eve', or 'Elizabeth's Prayer', from *Tannhäuser*. Allowing that, musically speaking, I was deceived (which is far from certain), I am quite sure that the root of the matter lay, not in me, but in those students by whom I was surrounded, who brought the roof down with their wild and sustained applause, yelling like madmen—or like the audience at a political meeting—and who, when they got home, would see in imagination a whole night of stars which the flimsy little romance would never have suggested to them if the composer's name had been, not that of the still honoured Wagner, but, say, of Gounod—at that time much despised.

Things have changed since those days, and the demand for nothing but French or Allied works in musical programmes has shaken the dust of years from *Faust* and *Romeo*. In such matters the cook has no choice but to follow the instructions of the nationalist doctor. The name of a sweet course can be changed as easily as the names of streets, and serious metaphysicians would not find it wholly impossible to write a

general history of philosophy without so much as mentioning the abhorred names of Leibnitz, Kant or Hegel—to say nothing of others—though the omissions might create gaps which would be inadequately filled by Victor Cousin.

It is in his relatively short poems (*La Pipe* is, I think his masterpiece) that Baudelaire is incomparable. The long poems, even *Voyage*,

*Pour l'enfant amoureux de cartes et d'estampes  
L'univers est égal à son vaste appétit.  
Ah! que le monde est grand à la clarté des lampes!  
Aux yeux du souvenir que le monde est petit!*

(and yet, Jacques Boulenger, by far the best critic—though he is more than that—of his generation, has the effrontery to say that Baudelaire never put *thought* into his work!)—even that sublime *Voyage*, which opens so well, is sustained only by an effort of rhetoric. Like many of the full-dress poems, like *Andromaque je pense à vous*, for instance it stops short, almost falls flat.

*Voyage* ends with the line:

*Au fond de l'Inconnu pour trouver du nouveau*

and *Andromaque* with:

*Aux captifs, aux vaincus, à bien d'autres encor.*

These simple conclusions may have been deliberate. But, making all allowances, it does seem as though they are evidence of curtailment, of a failure to stay the course.

Yet no poet ever had, to the same degree, such a feeling for *renewal*, even in the middle of a poem. Sometimes it shows by a sharp change of tone. I have already quoted that 'satanic' piece *Harpagon qui veillait son père agonisant*. A still more striking example (and one which Monsieur Fauré has admirably interpreted in one of his songs) is the poem which begins:

*Bientôt nous plongerons dans les froides ténèbres,*

and then straightway continues, without any transition, on an



entirely different note, with a line which, even when one sees it in print, one is tempted to sing:

*J'aime, de vos longs yeux, la lumière verdâtre.*

Elsewhere the poem is interrupted by a definite, a clear-cut piece of *action*. When Baudelaire has said: *Mon coeur est un palais* . . . quite suddenly, though there is no verbal explanation of what is occurring, a renewal of desire lays hold of him; the woman drives him to a fresh spasm, and the poet, intoxicated by the delights proffered him by the moment, yet, at the same time, thinking of the weariness that will come when all is over, cries:

*Un parfum nage autour de votre gorge nue  
O Beauté, dur fléau des âmes, tu le veux,  
Avec ces yeux de feu brillants comme des fêtes  
Calcine ces lambeaux qu'ont épargnés les bêtes.*

Some of his longer poems, on the other hand, are exceptions to this rule, and are carried through to the end without any weakening of the initial impulse: *Petites Vieilles*, for instance, which was, I am firmly convinced, for that very reason, dedicated to Victor Hugo. But that lovely poem is not the only one of his writings to leave on the reader a painful impression of cruelty. Although there is no fundamental reason why a man should not have a complete comprehension of suffering, and still be quite definitely not 'good', I have a feeling that when Baudelaire treated of those unhappy women in a mood of pity employing the accents of irony, he did not deliberately *mean* to be cruel. But he did not want his pity to be seen, was content if he could catch the peculiar *quality* of the spectacle presented to him, with the result that certain lines seem to hold a terrible and malicious beauty:

*Ou dansent sans vouloir danser, pauvres sonnettes . . .  
Je goûte à votre insu des plaisirs clandestins.*

The truth is, I think, that Baudelaire's poems were so strong,

so vigorous, so lovely, that he overstepped the limits without realising what he was doing. He wrote, on the subject of these miserable little old women, lines which, for sheer vitality, have never been equalled in the French language. But it no more occurred to him to soften the sharp edge of his phraseology, so as not to turn the knife in the wound of those already on the point of death, than it occurred to Beethoven, imprisoned in his deafness and intent on writing the *Ninth Symphony*, that the music was not uniformly suited to the capabilities of the human voice, with the result that, when sung, it always sounds slightly out of tune. The strangeness which, for me, is the chief charm of those intoxicating last Quartets, makes it impossible for some people, no matter how deep their appreciation of the divine sense of mystery which those compositions diffuse, to listen to them without having their teeth set on edge, except in piano transcriptions. It is for us to extract what of misery there may be in those little old women: *débris d'humanité pour l'Eternité mûrs*. The poet does not so much give it expression as make of it something that torments the reader. He confines himself to producing, with the sure touch of genius, a gallery of caricatures on the subject of old women, comparable to the grotesques of Leonardo da Vinci, portraits of unequalled greatness, but completely devoid of pity:

*Celle—là droite encor, fière et sentant le règle  
Humait avidement le chant vif et guerrier.  
Son œil parfois s'ouvrait comme l'œil d'un vieil aigle,  
Son front de marbre avait l'air fait pour le laurier.*

This poem, *Les Petites Vieilles*, is one of those in which Baudelaire shows his knowledge of antiquity. We notice it, too, in *Voyage*, where the story of Electra is mentioned as it might have been by Racine in one of his Prefaces; with this difference, that in those classical Prefaces, the allusions are, for the most part, produced in order to defend the author from reproach. One cannot help smiling when one sees the whole weight of Antiquity called upon to prove, in the Preface to *Phèdre*, that Racine has never 'written any tragedy in which



virtue is shown in a more favourable light. Even the lightest faults are severely punished and the thought of crime is approached with as much horror as crime itself. The weaknesses of love are shown as true weaknesses, and vice is painted in such vivid colours that its deformities must call forth nothing less than hatred.' Racine, a remarkably astute man, tell us how sorry he feels that Aristotle and Socrates are not called upon to be his judges, since they would have realised that his plays form a school in which virtue is no less admirably inculcated than in the Academies of Philosophy. Baudelaire is, perhaps, more honest in his prefatory poem to the reader: *Hypocrite lecteur, mon semblable, mon frère*. Taking difference of period into account, nothing is more Baudelairean than *Phèdre*, nothing more worthy of Racine, even of Malherbe, than *Fleurs du Mal*. But why speak of difference of periods? That difference did not prevent Baudelaire from writing, in true classical style:

*Et c'est encor, Seigneur, le meilleur témoignage  
Que nous puissions donner de notre dignité*

\* \* \* \*

*O Seigneur, donnez-moi la force et le courage*

\* \* \* \*

*Ses bras vaincus jetés comme de vaines armes,  
Tout servait, tout paraît sa fragile beauté.*

We know that these last lines refer to a woman exhausted by another woman's caresses. But had they been designed to show Junia before Nero, would Racine have expressed himself differently? If Baudelaire sought inspiration from Horace (in another of the poems about love between women), he goes, in fact, far beyond him. Instead of *animæ dimidium meæ* (of which I can't help believing that he was thinking) he wrote: *mon tout et ma moitié*. And, while we are on this subject, it must be admitted that, whenever Victor Hugo wished to refer to the classics, he did so with the freedom of a master, setting the royal stamp of genius on what he wrote (as, for example, in

that magnificent poem which ends with: *ni l'importunité des sinistres oiseaux*—a literal rendering of *importuniqué volucres*). In what I say about Baudelaire's classicism, I am being strictly truthful, scrupulous not to distort by ingenuity what the poet actually meant. On the contrary, I find far too ingenious, and not at all in the line of Baudelairean truth, the view put forward by one of my friends, that: *Sois sage, ô ma douleur, et tiens-toi plus tranquille* is nothing else than, *Pleurez, pleurez mes yeux et fondez-vous en eau*, from *Le Cid*. Not to mention that the Infanta's lines on '*respect de sa naissance*' from the same play would have been more relevant, this sort of parallelism seems to me to be wholly superficial. The exhortation addressed by Baudelaire to his own misery is not really in the least degree like an apostrophe in the manner of Corneille, but speaks the choked, shuddering language of a man trembling as a result of shedding too many tears.

The feelings about which I have been speaking, the sense of suffering and of death in a humble fraternity, leads us to this conclusion, that no one has ever written *better* of the People and of the Beyond, and that Victor Hugo remains merely the poet who has written of these things *at greatest length*. All Hugo's bombast and noise, all his dialogues with God, fade into insignificance when set beside what poor Baudelaire found in the intimacy of his own mental and bodily suffering. Nor was Baudelaire's inspiration at all indebted to Hugo. Of the two, it is not Hugo, with his sham medievalism, who might have been a carver of images in a cathedral, but Baudelaire, the impure man of faith, the casuist kneeling with a grimace upon his lips, and destined for damnation. But if the notes they sound about the People and about Death are so unequal, if the chord struck by Baudelaire is so much more tightly packed with harmonies, so much more resonant, I cannot say that Baudelaire surpasses Hugo in depicting love. To:

*Cette gratitude infinie et sublime*

*Qui sort de la paupière ainsi qu'un long soupir*

I prefer:



*Elle me regarda de ce regard suprême  
Qui reste à la beauté quand nous en triomphons.*

But love in Hugo and love in Baudelaire are two very different things. Baudelaire never sought inspiration in other poets. His world is a strange dividing up of time, in which only the red-letter days are shown. This explains such frequent expressions as, '*Si quelque soir*', etc. As to Baudelaire's 'stage properties'—which were no doubt modelled on the fashion in interior decoration of his day—they might provide a useful lesson for those elegant ladies of the last twenty years, who used to pride themselves that not a single 'false note' was to be found in their town houses. They would do well to consider, when they contemplate the alleged purity of style which they have achieved with such infinite trouble, that a man may be the greatest and most self-conscious of writers, yet describe nothing but beds with 'adjustable curtains' (*Pièces Condamnées*), halls like Conservatories (*Une Martyre*), beds filled with subtle scents, sofas deep as tombs, what-nots loaded with flowers, lamps burning for so short a time (*Pièces Condamnées*) that the only light comes from the coal fire. Baudelaire's world is a place to which, at rare moments, a perfumed breeze from the outer air brings refreshment and a sense of magic, sometimes on the wings of memory (*La Chevelure*, etc), sometimes in actual fact, thanks to those porticoes which are so frequently described in his poems, *ouverts sur des cieux inconnus* (*La Mort*) or, *que les soleils marins teignaient de mille feux*, (*La Vie Antérieure*).

I said just now that love in Baudelaire differs profoundly from love in Hugo. It has its own characteristics, and, in its more admissible forms, seems to have been peculiarly concentrated, where women were concerned, on hair, feet and knees:

*O toison moutonnant jusque sur l'encolure  
Cheveux bleus, pavillons de ténèbres tendus*  
(*La Chevelure*)

*Et tes pieds s'endormaient dans mes mains fraternelles*  
(*Le Balcon*)

*Et depuis tes pieds frais jusqu'à tes noires tresses  
(j'aurais) déroulé le trésor des profondes caresses*

I need scarcely point out that between hair and feet lies the whole of the rest of the body. We get the impression, however, that he paused for a very long time at the knees, when we notice how insistently, in *Les Fleurs du Mal*, he says:

*Ah! laissez-moi le front posé sur vos genoux  
(Chant d'Automne)*

*Dit celle dont jadis nous baisions les genoux  
(Le Voyage)*

The fact remains that there is something slightly peculiar about this manner of displaying the treasures of his more intimate caresses.

It is hardly possible to avoid saying something on the subject of love in the special sense that Baudelaire understood it, but the critic must be careful to keep shrouded in silence what Baudelaire himself thought that he should not speak out loud, that something at which, at most, he very occasionally hinted. When *Fleurs du Mal* appeared, Sainte-Beuve wrote ingenuously to Baudelaire that now the poems were collected, they produced quite a different effect from what they had done when read in isolation. This effect, favourable though it may have seemed to the author of *Les Lundis*, is terrifying and stupendous to anyone of my age, who was familiar with *Les Fleurs du Mal* only in the expurgated edition. We knew, of course, that Baudelaire had written a number of poems called *Femmes Damnées*; in fact, we had read them. But we had always thought of those items as being, not only 'prohibited' but 'different'. Many other poets had indulged in secret publications of much the same sort. We all, for instance, knew those two volumes of Verlaine's—as bad, incidentally, as *Femmes Damnées* are beautiful—called *Men, Women*. Schoolboys used regularly to pass round among themselves frankly pornographic volumes which were popularly supposed to be by Alfred de Musset, though it has never occurred to me, since leaving school,



to take the trouble to find out whether, in fact, they were. But with *Femmes Damnées* the case is quite different. . . Those who do not know what to expect are amazed, on opening a Baudelaire that follows exactly the original edition (Monsieur Félix Gautier's reprint, for example), to find that the most licentious, the coarsest, verses on the subject of love between women are to be found there, and that, with the innocence of genius, the great poet gives in this volume as much importance to a poem like *Delphine* as he does, say, to *Le Voyage* itself. I am not prepared wholly to agree with the view I once heard expressed by Monsieur Anatole France, that the volume contains some of the finest work that Baudelaire ever produced. There are, no doubt, magnificent things in it, but there are poems, also, that irritate one by such lines as:

*Laisse du vieux Platon se froncer l'œil austère.*

André Chénier said that Homer was still young after three thousand years. But Plato is still younger. The quotation I have just given is the work of an ignorant schoolboy—all the more surprising because Baudelaire had a feeling for philosophy, and made a point always of distinguishing form from content:

*(Alors, ô ma beauté, dites à la vermine  
Qui vous mangera de baisers  
Que j'ai gardé la forme et l'essence divine  
De mes amours décomposés*

or, again:

*Réponds, cadavre impur . . .  
Ton époux court le monde et ta forme immortelle . . .)*

But, unfortunately, scarcely has he had time to drown his rancour in the verses that follow—the most beautiful that he ever wrote—than the poetic form of his adoption, brings him, five lines further on, to that:

*Laisse du vieux Platon se froncer l'œil austère.*

That form produces its loveliest effects in *Le Balcon*:

*Les soirs illuminés par l'ardeur du charbon,*

though I prefer even to that this passage from *Les Bijoux*:

*Et la lampe s'étant résignée à mourir  
Comme le foyer seul illuminait la chambre  
Chaque fois qu'il poussait un flamboyant soupir  
Il inondait de sang cette peau couleur d'ambre.*

But in the prohibited poems it is wearying and useless. When, in the first line, he has said:

*Pour savoir si la mer est indulgente et bonne*

there is no point in repeating it in the fifth:

*Pour savoir si la mer est indulgente et bonne.*

It is true, all the same, that the really magnificent poems of the collection, taken in conjunction with the others, do, as Sainte-Beuve wrote—though he did not realise how true the statement was—produce quite a different effect.<sup>1</sup> They take their place once more among the grandest poems in the book, like those crystal-clear waves that heave majestically after a night of storm, and, by interposing their crests between the spectator and the immense sweep of the ocean, give a sense of space and distance to the view. The reader's emotion is still further increased when he learns that these poems were not merely included on equal terms with the others, but were, for their author, actually the key-pieces, so that he at first intended to call the volume, not *Les Fleurs du Mal*, but *Les Lesbiennes*. The more appropriate and more general title, *Les Fleurs du Mal*—a title which, today, we can no longer tease out from the history of French literature—was not found by Baudelaire at all, but was suggested to him by Babou. The collection includes

<sup>1</sup> I dare not enlarge upon Sainte-Beuve's behaviour to Baudelaire, because I learn that I have been anticipated by Monsieur Fernand Vanderem who, in a remarkable pamphlet, has discussed the established text in a manner that permits of no contradiction, and establishes the whole terrible truth.



a great deal more than lesbians, though it does not exclude them, because, seen in the light of Baudelaire's moral, no less than of his æsthetic, standards, they are essentially *Fleurs du Mal*. But how did he come to be so interested in lesbians that he actually proposed to use the word as the title of that whole superb volume? When Vigny, raging against women, thought to find the explanation of the mystery of their sex in the fact that women give suck:

*Il rêvera toujours à la chaleur du sein*

in the peculiar nature of their physiology:

*Enfant malade et douze fois impur*

in their psychology:

*Toujours ce compagnon dont le cœur n'est pas sûr*

it is easy to see why, in his frustrated and jealous passion, he could write:

*La femme aura Gomorrhe et l'Homme aura Sodome.*

But he does, at least, see the two sexes at odds, facing one another as enemies across a great gulf:

*Et se jetant de loin un regard irrité  
Les deux sexes mourront chacun de son côté.*

But this did not hold true of Baudelaire:

*Car Lesbos entre tous m'a choisi sur la terre  
Pour chanter le secret de ses vierges en fleurs  
Et je fus dès l'enfance admis au noir mystère.*

This 'connection' between Sodom and Gomorrha, is what, in the final section of my novel (not in the first part of *Sodome*, which has just appeared) I have shown in the person of a brutish creature, Charles Morel (it is usually to brutish creatures that this part is allotted). But it would seem that Baudelaire cast himself for it, and looked on the rôle as a privilege. It would be intensely interesting to know why he chose to assume

it, and how well he acquitted himself. What is comprehensible in a Charles Morel, becomes profoundly mysterious in the author of *Les Fleurs du Mal*.

After these great poets (I have not the time to speak here of the part played in Baudelaire's work by ancient cities, or of the scarlet note that they strike, here and there, in the fabric of his poetry), I can call to mind no real geniuses until the Parnassians and the Symbolists appeared upon the scene. Musset, all things considered, remains a poet of the second order, and his admirers are so well aware of this fact, that they habitually ignore one whole side of his work, and return to it only when they have tired of the other. Wearied by the declamatory tone of *Nuits*—which, however, embodies the style to which he was always logically tending—they ring the changes on his lesser verse:

*Plus ennuyeuse que Milan*

*Où du moins deux ou trois fois l'an Cerrilo danse.*

But they become discouraged a little further on in the same poem when he writes of Venice where he left his heart. So they turn for relief to those purely documentary pieces which paint for us the fashionable balls of Musset's day. Such trivia do not make a poet (in spite of the laughable enthusiasm with which Monsieur Taine has spoken of the music, the colour, etc, of these poems). Finally, they return to *Nuits*, to *l'Espoir en Dieu*, to *Rolla*, which, in the meantime have assumed a degree of freshness. Only such delicate poems as *Namouna* are still full of life, and put forth their flowers all the year round.

The noble Sully Prudhomme lives at a still lower level, that man of the profile and the look that was at once divine and horselike, despite the fact that he was not a particularly vigorous Pegasus. Some of his elegiac openings have a certain charm:

*Aux étoiles j'ai dit un soir*

*Vous ne me semblez pas heureuses.*

But, unfortunately, he will not leave well alone, and the two subsequent lines rank among the most appalling that I can remember to have read anywhere:



*Vos lueurs dans l'infini noir  
Ont des tendresses douloureuses.*

Then, at the very end, two more delightful lines. Elsewhere he gracefully confesses:

*Je n'aime pas les maisons neuves  
Elles ont l'air indifférent.*

Alas! he proceeds at once to add, so far as I can remember:

*Les vieilles ont l'air de veuves  
Qui se souviennent en pleurant.*

A few of his 'Farewells to the Reader' are worthy of Musset's poems in the same sort, though they are less nimble. Still, they are thoughtful, sensitive, and, generally, charming. But all this is very far from romanticism and the great Valmore. One man, and one man alone (before the coming of the Parnassians and the Symbolists) continued, though in a very much diminished form, the tradition of the Great Masters—Leconte de Lisle. True, he had reacted, to some purpose, away from a language which was all the time becoming looser, but it would be wrong to think that he was, to any very great extent, different from the writers who had preceded him.

Here is a little game. Take any two lines: for instance—

*La neige tombe en paix sur tes épaules nues*

and

*L'aube au flanc noir des monts marche d'un pied vermeil*

and tell me who wrote them. The first, very Leconte de Lisle in feeling, is from Alfred de Musset's *La Coupe et les Lèvres*: the second is Leconte de Lisle, and is taken from what is perhaps the most ravishing poem he ever wrote, *La Fontaine aux Lianes*. Leconte de Lisle set himself to purify the language. He showed no mercy to flat and stupid metaphors, and pruned them drastically. For all that, he could make use of the phrase (and with very happy effect) *aile du vent*, and elsewhere could speak

of *rire amoureux du vent; gouttes de cristal de la rosée; robe de feu de la terre; coupe du soleil; cendre du soleil* and *vol de l'illusion*.

I have seen him listening, with a sarcastic expression, to some of Musset's loveliest poems, but quite often he is, himself, only another Musset, less rigid, perhaps, but certainly no less declamatory. The resemblance is sometimes so deceptive, that, for the life of me, I cannot remember whether:

*Tu ne sommeillais pas calme comme Ophélie*

which, I feel sure, must be by Leconte de Lisle, is not, in fact, by Musset, so like is it to something of the latter's. Leconte de Lisle, apart from the images which he borrowed from other poets, had his own peculiar oddities of metaphor. Animals, in his poems, are always 'the Chief', 'the King', 'the Prince' of something or other, as Midi is *Roi des Étés*. He could not rest content with saying just 'Lion'—but must have: *Voici ton heure ô Roi de Sennaar, ô Chef!* The tiger, for him, became *La Reine de Java, la noire chasseresse*, the jaguar: *Chasseur au beau poil*, the wolf: *Seigneur du Hartz*, the albatross: *Roi de l'Espace*, the shark: *sinistre rôdeur des steppes de la mer*. But I had better stop before I become involved in all the snakes! Later, it is true, he abandoned metaphors, and, like Flaubert, with whom he has many points of resemblance, was anxious that nothing should interpose between the object and the way in which it was served up. When he describes Magnus's greyhounds he does so with an accuracy, a truth to nature, such as Flaubert might have employed in *La Légende de Saint Julien l'Hospitalier*:

*L'arc vertébral tendu, nœuds par nœuds étagé  
Il a posé sa tête aiguë entre ses pattes*

and so on, and so on, in the same admirable manner. But I should not, for all that, have picked on Leconte de Lisle as the last poet of any considerable talent (before the coming of the Parnassians and the Symbolists) were it not for the fact that there is in him a new and delicious *spring* of poetry, a



feeling of freshness, brought, no doubt, from the tropical countries in which he had lived. On that point I have no information, and regret that, before writing to you, my dear Rivière, I was not able to seek out one great poet over whose beginnings Leconte de Lisle watched with a paternal eye—Madame Henri de Régnier. She, I doubt not, would, with a carefully placed word here and there, have corrected one or two of my over-confident statements. But all we have tried to do today, you and I, is to read together out loud, trusting to our memories and to our critical sense: is it not so? Now if, without definite information of any sort, one merely lets a few carefully chosen lines by Leconte de Lisle drift into the memory, one is struck by the consistent manner in which, not only *the* sun, but many varieties of sun, figure in his poetry. I will say no more about *la cendre du soleil* which so constantly recurs in his work, but I must draw attention to *les joyeux soleils des naïves années*, the *stériles soleils qui n'êtes plus que des cendres*, and *tant de soleils qui ne reviendront plus*, etc. Doubtless, these many suns draw after them a host of memories of ancient theogonies. A sense of 'divinity' broods about the horizon of these poems. The life of the ancient world finds the inexhaustible elements of its being in:

(le) *tourbillon sans fin des espérances vaines.*

These suns which:

*L'Esprit qui les songea les entraîne au néant.*

We find so much subjective idealism somewhat boring, but it can be cut away. There remains—the light, and its delicious complement—the freshness. Baudelaire had a lively recollection of all this tropical nature. Even, *derrière la muraille immense du brouillard*, he made his negress evoke *les cocotiers absents de la superbe Afrique*; though one feels tempted to say that he never saw them except from the deck of a ship. Lecomte de Lisle had lived there, had caught and tasted every aspect of the scene. When he speaks of watercourses, we feel that his use of such words as *germer*, *circuler*, *filtrer*, is something more than merely

rhetorical. Even so simple a word as *gravier* is not introduced at random. What charm there is in the lines which describe how he took refuge near the *Fontaine aux Lianes*, a place, one would almost say, created for his own personal and solitary use:

*Qui dès le premier jour n'a connu que peu d'hôtes.  
Le bruit n'y monte pas de la mer sur les côtes,  
Ni la rumeur de l'homme, on y peut oublier.  
Ce sont des chœurs soudains de chansons infinies.*

There the azure is so mild that it suffices to dry the plumage of the birds:

*L'oiseau tout couvert d'étincelles  
Montait sécher son aile—*

(in one of the poems: *à la brise plus chaude*; in another,

*Au tiède firmament—)  
A peine une échappée étincelante et bleue  
Laisait-elle entrevoir en ce pan du ciel pur  
Vers Rodrigue ou Ceylan le vol des paille-en-queue  
Comme un flocon de neige égaré dans l'azur.*

Is not that very pretty, my dear Rivière? It may not be up to the level of Baudelaire, but ought we not to bring lines like that to the attention of readers today, who revel in so much bad poetry? Of recent years the French have learned to appreciate their churches, and all the architectural treasures of their country. It were well that we should not let them become forgetful of those other monuments, with all their wealth of form and thought, that rear themselves from the pages of books.

Marcel Proust

When I wrote this letter to Jacques Rivière, I had no book within reach of my sick-bed. I must, therefore, ask the reader's forgiveness of any inaccuracies in my quotations. They are, in any case, easily rectified. I never set out to do anything else than to flick through the pages of my memory, and to give



some direction to the taste of my friends. I have put down only about half of what I wanted to say, and, consequently, more than twice what I set myself to say, which, had it been more condensed, less encumbered with quotations (or adorned with others, more striking, which rise now from the depths of my memory as though to reproach me with having ignored them) would have been infinitely shorter. I have left much unsaid; this, among other things, that Monsieur Halévy is perfectly right in charging me (he has Sainte-Beuve on his side) with making too much of the descriptive adjective, for it is true that a verb can do the work of description equally well. I must, too, bow to the judgment of those who do not share my view that there is only one way of painting an object.

In *La Chevelure* Baudelaire says:

*Un ciel pur où frémit l'éternelle chaleur*

and, in its companion prose poem:

*Où se prélassse l'éternelle chaleur.*

Here we have two versions, each beautiful, and in both cases the epithet is a verb. May I add that no one has written to me pointing this out, and that it is my own unaided memory that, as Molière puts it, 'has broken its nose' against the hard substance of my reasoning. I still maintain that there is nothing especially remarkable about the passage in Sainte-Beuve which Monsieur Halévy quoted about a year ago, and with which I am perfectly familiar. Nor is there any particular reason why we should go into ecstasies over those very accurate observations of Virgil's which the author of *Les Lundis* takes so much delight in trotting out. Anyone who had been condemned, as I have been, to live for years in a room where the shutters are kept closed, and the only light is supplied by electricity, would naturally envy the sage of Mantua his beautiful walks. But it would be odd, indeed, if the man who spent so much of his life in writing the *Georgics* and the *Bucolics*, had never thought to spare a glance for the sky and for the effect of clouds in stormy weather. It is all very charming, no doubt, but I see no reason

to get excited over such elementary observations of nature. On this same subject of clouds, Chateaubriand gives us a great deal more than mere observation: he gives us impressions—which are not at all the same thing—presented with genius. But this in no way detracts from my admiration of Virgil. The danger of articles like Sainte-Beuve's, is that when a George Sand or a Fromentin make similar remarks one is tempted to find them 'worthy of Virgil', which means precisely nothing. It is the fashion today to say of writers who use only the vocabulary of Voltaire, that they 'write as well as Voltaire'. That is untrue. To write as well as Voltaire a man must begin by writing differently from Voltaire. Much the same sort of misunderstanding is to be found in the recent revival of interest in Moréas. And there are other cases. A great deal of fuss has been made about Toulet, who died recently. All his friends say, and I am prepared to believe them, that he was a delightful fellow. Certainly, what I have read of his verse, or heard quoted, is often charming, graceful, and, at times, rises to true eloquence. But that is no reason why Monsieur Allard should say, as he has, that the very smallness of Toulet's output is an added reason for believing that he will 'live'. A man who travels so lightly, he remarks (though not, perhaps, in exactly those words) can glide more easily into the minds of posterity. My answer is, that if such an argument be admissible, there is scarcely any claim one could not make. It is the quality of a writer's work that posterity acclaims. Its quantity is beside the point. Posterity can admit the huge *Marriage in Cana* or the *Mémoires* of Saint-Simon with as little difficulty as a Rondel by Charles of Orléans or a tiny but divine Vermeer. Monsieur Allard's argument brings to my mind a quite different, quite inexact and wholly absurd remark once made by Voltaire. It is so amusing, false though it may be, that I regret my inability to quote it accurately. 'Dante' [he says] 'is assured of immortality, because so few people read him.'



## PREFACE

### TO PAUL MORAND'S *TENDRES STOCKS*

THE Athenians have been slow about staging their own execution. So far, only three young women, or, rather, matrons, have been delivered to that Minotaur of ours who goes by the name of Morand, though the Treaty stipulated for seven. But the year has not yet ended, and there are many candidates, though not openly recognised as such, who seek the same glorious fate as Clarisse and Aurore. I should have enjoyed undertaking the wholly unnecessary task of composing for the entrancing short novels that bear the names of these two beautiful women, a genuine Preface. An unexpected occurrence has prevented me from doing so. A strange lady has taken it upon herself to effect a lodgment in my brain. She comes and she goes. Now, after all this restless to-ing and fro-ing I am beginning to know her ways. Like a too forthcoming tenant she has been trying to strike up an intimacy with me. I was surprised to find that she was by no means beautiful. I had always thought that beauty was Death's distinguishing mark. Why, otherwise, should she get the better of any of us? But be that as it may, she seems, for some days now, to have absented herself from her usual haunts, though, judging by what she has left behind her, she will not be away for long. It would be far wiser to profit by the respite thus allowed me otherwise than by writing a Preface for an author who does not need one.

There is another reason that should have kept me from doing so. My dear master, Anatole France, whom, alas! I have not seen for more than twenty years, has just written, in the *Revue de Paris*, an article in which he declares that all oddity of style should be avoided. Now if anything is certain it is that Paul Morand's style is distinctly 'odd'. Should I ever have the very great pleasure of meeting once again Monsieur France, of whose kindness I have so lively a memory, I shall ask him how he can possibly believe in a standardised style, seeing that every man's

sensibilities are different. A beautiful style is an infallible sign that thought has been raised to a higher 'power', that it has discovered and affirmed certain necessary connections between objects which the chances of life have divorced. Is it not true that in *Le Crime de Sylvestre Bonnard* the double impression of savagery and gentleness produced on us by cats, makes up the movement of one whole and admirable paragraph? "Hamilcar" said I, stretching my legs, "dozing prince of the city of books [I have not the volume by me] . . . sleep on in all the easy relaxation of a Sultan, within that stronghold so surely guarded by the military virtues. For you combine with the formidable appearance of a Tartar warrior the overblown grace of the women of the East. Heroic and voluptuous Hamilcar" . . . etc. But Monsieur France will not agree with me about the excellence of this passage, because, according to him, bad writing has become the rule since the end of the eighteenth century.

Bad writing has become the rule since the end of the eighteenth century. There is much to be said on that theme. No doubt a great many authors of the nineteenth century have written badly. When Monsieur France asks us to abandon to his tender mercies Guizot and Thiers (unfair though that combination is to Guizot), we joyfully accede to his request. Nor do we await any further suggestion from him before throwing in, unprompted, all the Villemains and Cousins he could possibly want. Monsieur Taine, whose prose reminds one of a coloured relief map designed to arouse interest in the minds of very junior schoolboys, may still find honour with some, but his name is down, nevertheless, for banishment. If, out of consideration for his accurate enunciation of moral truths, we spare Monsieur Renan, we can hardly avoid admitting that he often wrote very badly. Not to mention his later works, in which the colours so constantly jar that one is tempted to believe in a deliberate effort on his part to be comic, or his earliest, to which a rash of exclamation marks gives the appearance of a sentimental effusion perpetrated by a choirboy, even the lovely *Origines du*



*Christianisme* is, for the most part, badly written. It is rare to find in a prose writer of merit so complete an inability to paint a picture. The description of Jerusalem at the time of Jesus's first entry, is composed in the style of Baedeker: 'The buildings could stand comparison with the grandest achievements of Antiquity, for their size, the perfection of their finish and the beauty of their materials. A group of superb tombs, all displaying much originality of taste', etc. So 'purple a patch' as that ought to have been handled with very great care indeed, and Renan's idea of 'treating' a purple patch was to give it an air of pomposity reminiscent of Ary Scheffer, Gounod, (and, we might add, of César Franck, if he had never written anything but *The Redemption*, with its air of forced solemnity). Whenever he sets himself to provide a fitting ending to a book, or a Preface, he can achieve nothing better than one of those ready-made images so dear to the school essay writer, which express no genuine personal impression, at all. 'Now the apostolic ship could spread its sails.' 'When the dazzling glare had withdrawn before the innumerable army of the stars' — 'Death struck both of us with his wing.' When, in speaking of the time spent by Jesus in Jerusalem, Monsieur Renan insists on referring to him as the 'young Jewish democrat', and refers to the 'crudities' that were for ever falling from the lips of this 'man of the provinces' (how like Balzac!) one is inclined to wonder, as I did more than once, whether, for all its author's genius, *La Vie de Jésus* is not really just the *Belle Hélène* of Christianity. But let not Monsieur France be in too great a hurry to raise his cry of triumph. This is not the place for me to impart to him my own ideas on the subject of style. That must be for another day. But is it quite so certain as he thinks that the nineteenth century was as wholly lacking in this matter as he would have us believe? There is often, in Baudelaire's style, something objective and startling: but for sheer power I very much doubt whether it has ever been equalled. It would be difficult to find anything ever written on Charity that is at the same time so lacking in charity yet so powerful as the following lines:

*Un ange furieux fond du ciel comme un aigle  
 Du mécréant saisit à pleins poings les cheveux  
 Et dit le secouant, tu connaîtras la règle . . .  
 Sache qu'il faut aimer sans faire la grimace  
 Le pauvre, le méchant, le tortu, l'hébété,  
 Pour que tu puisses faire à Jésus quand il passe  
 Un tapis triomphal avec ta charité . . .*

or more sublime, though expressing almost nothing of the essence of devotion than:

*Ont dit au dévouement qui leur prêtait ses ailes  
 Hippogriffe puissant, mène moi jusqu'au ciel.*

Baudelaire is a great classical poet, but the curious thing about him is that the classicism of his form increases in proportion to the licentiousness of his painting. Racine wrote a great deal of much profounder poetry than Baudelaire ever did, but he never achieved a purer style than that of the sublime *Poèmes Condamnés*. These two lines from the piece that caused the most violent sense of scandal:

*Ses bras vaincus jetés comme des vaines armes  
 Tout servait, tout paraît sa fragile beauté.*

might have come straight out of *Britannicus*.

Poor Baudelaire! He went to Sainte-Beuve, begging him to write an article about his work (with what deference, what gentleness!), and all he got was this sort of faint praise: 'What is certain is that Monsieur Baudelaire gains on personal acquaintance. One expects to see a strange, eccentric creature, instead of which, lo and behold!—a well-mannered candidate for recognition, a charming, rather diffident chap, whose vocabulary is exquisite, whose form classical.' When Sainte-Beuve wished to thank Baudelaire for the dedication of *Fleurs du Mal*, the only complimentary thing he could find to say was that, when the poems were read as a collection, their effect was very different from that produced when they were studied separately. He ended by picking on certain pieces which he qualified with double-edged epithets — 'precious', 'subtle', and asked, 'But



why were they not written in Latin, or, rather, in Greek?' Fine praise, indeed, for French poems! The account of the contacts between Baudelaire and Sainte-Beuve (Sainte-Beuve whose stupidity was such that we sometimes wonder whether it was not assumed in order to conceal his moral cowardice) is one of the most heart-rending, but, at the same time, most comical chapters in the whole history of French literature. There was a time when I wondered whether Monsieur Daniel Halévy were not pulling my leg because, in a magnificent article which he wrote for *La Minerve Française*, he did his best to make us feel kindly disposed to Sainte-Beuve's hypocrisy when he said to Baudelaire, to an accompaniment of crocodile tears: 'My poor young man, how terribly you must have suffered!' Seeking, on another occasion, to compliment the poet, Sainte-Beuve remarked: 'I ought to give you a good scolding . . . you embroider and poeticise the horrible. One of these days' [I quote from memory] 'when we go walking by the shore, I shall feel tempted to trip you up and so force you to swim in the open sea!' It would be foolish to attach too much importance to the actual image (which may be a good deal better in the text), because Sainte-Beuve, who knew nothing whatever about such things, liked to take his illustrations from the hunting field, the ocean, etc. He said, for instance, 'I should like to take down my carbine and go into the contry to do a bit of bird-stalking.' Speaking of some book, he remarked: 'It is a veritable etching', though he would not have recognised an etching if he had seen one. But he held the view that such phrases look well in literary compositions, that they produce a pretty and graceful effect. But how could Monsieur Daniel Halévy (who, since that day, twenty-five years ago when I first set eyes on him, has been regularly growing in critical stature) seriously think that it was not the malicious producer of patched and shoddy phrases who was doing the 'embroidering and poeticising' rather than the great genius to whom we owe (and there is nothing of 'embroidery' in these lines, nothing that, so far as I can make out, is not the result of swimming 'in the open sea'):

*Pour l'enfant amoureux de cartes et d'estampes  
 L'univers est égal à son vaste appétit  
 Comme le monde est grand à la clarté des lampes!  
 Aux yeux du souvenir que le monde est petit.*

The last straw was when Baudelaire was prosecuted for having published *Fleurs du Mal*, and Sainte-Beuve refused to testify on his behalf, but wrote him a letter which he insisted on having back when he learned that it was to be made public. When, at a later date, he printed it in *Les Causeries de Lundi*, he saw fit to add a short preamble (designed still more to weaken its effect), in which he said that the letter had been written 'with the idea of helping the defence'. Not that his praise was very compromising. 'The poet Baudelaire' (he had said) 'has spent long years in the work of extracting poisonous juices from every subject and from every flower; pleasantly poisonous, it must be admitted. Nevertheless, he was a man of intelligence who could, at times, be very charming, and was certainly capable of affection. When the volume called *Fleurs du Mal* was published, he had to face, not only criticism but a criminal action as well, as though there could really have been any danger in his swathed and swaddled evil, or in the vague implications of his elegant rhymes.' (which, by the way, scarcely agrees with that earlier—'My poor young man, how terribly you must have suffered!'). In this projected defence, Sainte-Beuve does say one or two fine things about an illustrious poet—('Far be it for me to diminish in any degree the glory of an illustrious poet, dear to all of us, to whom the Emperor has seen fitting to accord a public funeral'), but, unfortunately, the poet thus glorified was not Baudelaire at all, but Béranger. When Baudelaire, on Sainte-Beuve's advice withdrew his candidature for the Academy, the great critic congratulated him, and imagined that the man must be overwhelmed with joy when he said: 'While the final paragraph of your letter of thanks, couched in language that combined modesty with good manners, was being read, there was a general murmur of—"very nicely put" . . .'. The most staggering part of the whole business is that not only



did Saint-Beuve think that he had behaved very well to Baudelaire, but that, starved as Baudelaire had always been of any real encouragement, and denied the most elementary justice, he, too, shared the critic's views, and literally could not find words in which to express his gratitude.

Fascinating though this story of genius denying itself must be, we have to tear ourselves away from it in order to get back to the problem of style. Most certainly, style did not have for Stendhal the same importance as for Baudelaire. When Beyle described a landscape as 'an enchanting spot' or a 'ravishing spot', and one of his heroines as 'this adorable woman', 'this charming woman', it was because he felt no need of any greater precision. He was quite capable of saying—'She wrote him a letter that went on for ever'. But if one considers the great unconscious, bony structure which underlay the conscious and deliberate development of his thought, as being a part of style, then style Stendhal most certainly had. It would give me great pleasure to demonstrate how, every time that Julien Sorel or Fabrice abandoned their vain broodings, and plunged into a life of pure animal enjoyment in which self-consciousness played no part, it was always when they were in some place raised high above the earth's surface (whether the prison where Fabrice was confined, or Julien in the Abbé Banés's observatory). The effect is as fine as that produced by those figures who, with something of Angels in an Annunciation about them, bow down, in Dostoievsky, before the very man for whose murder they know themselves to have been responsible.

In this respect, Beyle was a great writer—without realising it. He ranked literature not only lower than life (though, in fact, it is life's fulfilment), but even lower than the most insipid of distractions. I must admit that the following passage from Stendhal would, were it sincerely meant, shock me profoundly:

'Several people arrived, and the party did not break up until very late. The nephew had an excellent *zabaglione* sent in from the Café Pedroti. "Where I am going", said I to my friends, "I am not likely to find a house such as this, and, to occupy

myself during the long evenings, I shall set about writing a story on the subject of the charming Duchesse Sanseverina" . . . ' The idea of the *Chartreuse de Parme* having been written as a compensation for the lack of a house where he could find agreeable conversation, and eat *zabaglione*, is a far call from that poem, or even from that single line which, according to Mallarmé, is the justification of the various and vain activities of the human hive.

'Since the end of the eighteenth century, the art of writing has been lost.' Would not the contrary statement be equally true? It looks as though the word *talent*, when used with reference to the arts, means that something which brings the artist into an ever closer relationship with the object to be expressed. So long as there is any degree of separation between them, the task of the artist is incomplete. When a violinist achieves a difficult passage with a superb show of technical skill, the audience duly applauds. But what it applauds is the too obvious effect which he deliberately sets himself to produce, in which case he is nothing but a virtuoso. Only when we, the listeners, cease to be aware of the mere *technique*, only when the passage becomes wholly one with the artist, only when he seems to have become completely dissolved in it, will the final miracle be produced. It seems that, in other centuries, there was always some degree of distance between the *object* and the great spirits who discoursed upon it. But, in, for example, the case of Flaubert, the intelligence—which was not, perhaps, his strongest point—managed to *identify itself* with, say, the shuddering movement of a steamboat, with the colour of churned foam, with an islet lying out in the bay. A moment comes, in reading him, when one is no longer conscious of the writer's intelligence (even when, as with Flaubert, that intelligence is somewhat mediocre), but only of the moving ship—'running into floating bales of timber which bobbed up and down in the brisk agitation of the waves'. That word 'bobbed' shows us intelligence transformed, intelligence that has become part and parcel of the physical scene. Similarly, it can penetrate the tangle of the heath, the trunks of trees, the silence and the light of the



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underbrush. Is it not the first concern of any artist intent on style to achieve just this transformation of energy in which the thinker disappears, and the objects which he is busy depicting become real and actual to our eyes?

But this Monsieur France denies. 'What is your criterion?' he asks in the article which gave such a brilliant send-off to André Chaumeix's *Revue de Paris*. Among the criteria which he proposes for our adoption, and by the standard of which modern writing is to be considered bad, he mentions Racine's *Lettres aux Imaginaires*. In point of fact, I am resolute in my refusal to accept the very idea of 'criteria', in this sense, for the very good reason that it means setting up a fixed standard of style to express thoughts that are, in fact, far from being fixed or all of the same kind. But, assuming for the moment, that some criterion *has* to be adopted, and one that shall not be too exacting—for Monsieur France does not wish us to be too heavily burdened—I should certainly not pick on *Lettres aux Imaginaires*, on a piece of writing, that is, so dry, so threadbare, so short-winded. It is easy for an artistic form which contains so small a quantity of thought to be light and graceful. But *Lettres aux Imaginaires* are neither. '*Je croirai même si vous voulez, que vous n'êtes pas de Port-Royal comme le dit l'un de vous . . . Combien de gens ont lu sa lettre qui ne l'eussent pas regardée si le Port-Royal ne l'eut adoptée, si ces messieurs ne l'eussent distribuée*', etc . . . '*Vous croyez dire par exemple quelque chose de fort agréable quand vous dites sur une exclamation que fait M. Chamillard, que son grand O n'est qu'un o en chiffre . . . on voit bien que vous vous efforcez d'être plaisant. Mais ce n'est pas le moyen de l'être.*' I don't say that such repetitions would hold up the rapid movement of one of Saint-Simon's phrases, but, in this particular case, where is the quick movement, where the poetry? where the style? Indeed these letters to the author of the *Imaginaires* are almost as feeble as the absurd correspondence which passed between Racine and Boileau when they set about exchanging views on medicine. Such was the snobbery of Boileau (we, today, should call it the excessive deference of an official to the world of

officialdom) that he actually preferred to the opinion of medical men the advice of Louis XIV (who was wise enough not to give it). He is convinced that a Prince who had succeeded in taking Luxembourg must be inspired from on high, and can utter nothing but oracles, even in the matter of medicine. (I feel certain that, no matter how legitimately my masters, Messieurs Léon Daudet and Charles Maurras, together with their charming rival, Jacques Bainville, may entertain feelings of admiration for the Duc d'Orléans, they would scarcely go to the extreme of consulting him by letter on questions of medical treatment!) Who, adds Boileau, would not be only too pleased to lose his voice, or even the power of speech, if it meant that the King would ask news of him?

It is pointless to answer that all this belongs to a particular historical period, when such expressions were the common run of epistolary style. The answer to such an argument lies close at hand. On a certain Wednesday of 1673 (probably in the December of that year), that is to say, midway between the appearance of *Les Lettres aux Imaginaires* in 1666 and the publication of the correspondence of Racine and Boileau in 1687, Madame de Sevigné wrote from Marseilles as follows:

*Je suis charmée de la beauté singulière de cette ville. Hier, le temps fut divin, en l'endroit d'où je découvris la mer, les bastides, les montagnes et la ville est une chose étonnante. La foule des chevaliers qui vinrent hier voir M. de Grignan à son arrivée; des noms connus, des Saint-Hérem, etc; des aventuriers, des épées, des chapeaux du bel air; des gens faits à peindre une idée de guerre, de roman, d'embarquement, d'aventure, de chaînes, de fers d'esclaves, de servitude, de captivité: moi qui aime les romans, tout cela me ravit.*

To be sure, this is not one of my favourites among the letters of Madame de Sevigné; still, in composition, colour and variety, what a picture on the grand scale from the hand of that great writer! In its own way it is magnificent, and I offer it to a male descendant of that family to which Madame de Sevigné



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was never tired of boasting that she belonged, through the Grignans—to my friend the Marquis de Castellane.

Set beside such passages as that, the thin correspondence of which I have been speaking, fades into insignificance. Not but what Boileau was an excellent, at times even, a delightful, poet, and that in Racine an hysterical spirit of genius was constantly at war with an intelligence of the highest order which strove to keep it in subjection. It stimulated, with a degree of perfection that has never been equalled, the very ebb and flow, the multiple voice, the complete dominance, of passion. But that does not alter the fact that all the declarations (withdrawn as soon as the speaker feels that they have been ill-received, reiterated when she fears—with no matter how little genuine excuse—that they have not been understood, and intensified in the most unambiguous way after so many sinuous indirections of approach) which fill with such inimitable movement this or that scene of *Phèdre*, cannot, retrospectively, but leave us with a feeling of far from delighted surprise, when we find their equivalent in the *Lettres aux Imaginaires*. If we really *had* to adopt a criterion of the kind that is to be found in these Letters, we should be far better advised to turn our attention to a period when, according to Monsieur France, good writing had become a thing of the past, and to read the Preface (on certain states of semi-insanity) which Gérard de Nerval dedicated to Alexandre Dumas. *Ils [his sonnets] perdraient de leur charme à être expliqués, si la chose était possible; concédez-moi du moins le mérite de l'expression; la dernière folie qui me restera probablement c'est de me croire poète: c'est à la critique de m'en guérir.* Here is something—if we are to take the *Imaginaires* as our criterion—which is as well, nay, better, written. But I repudiate 'criteria' of any sort. The truth (and this Monsieur France knows better than anybody else, because he knows everything better than anybody else) is that from time to time a new and original writer appears (call him, if you will, Jean Giraudoux or Paul Morand, since Morand and Giraudoux are always linked—I don't know why—like Natoire and Falconet in the marvellous *Nuit de Chateauroux*, though there is no resemblance between

them). The new writer is, as a rule, rather exhausting to read and difficult to understand, because he is for ever finding new relationships between things. One follows him half-way through a phrase, but then one's endurance gives out. One feels the reason to be merely this, that the new writer has a more agile mind than one's own. It is with original writers as it is with original painters. When Renoir began to paint, no one recognised the objects which he set himself to represent. It is easy, today, to speak of him as having an eighteenth century spirit. But, in saying that, people omit the time factor, and forget that, even in the middle of the nineteenth century, it took a long time for Renoir to be accepted as a great painter. If they are to succeed, they have—the original painter and the original writer—to proceed much in the manner of oculists. The treatment administered through their paintings or their literature, is not always pleasant. When it is finished, they say to us: 'Now look!' and suddenly, the world, which, far from having been created once and for all, is created afresh each time that a new artist comes on the scene, is shown to us in perfect clarity—but looking very different from the one we knew before. We are enchanted by Renoir's women, by Morand's or Giraudoux's, though, before undergoing treatment, we should have refused to admit that they were women at all. And, straightway, we are seized with a longing to wander in the forest which, when first we saw it, looked anything *but* a forest, looked, for instance, like a tapestry, showing every shade of colour, every nuance of form *except* the colours and the forms peculiar to forests. Such is the new and perishable universe which the author creates, and it will remain convincing—until a new artist arises. Much could be said on this subject. But the reader, who, no doubt, has already guessed what that much consists of, will do it a great deal better than I could do, merely by reading *Clarisse*, *Aurore* and *Delphine*.<sup>1</sup>

The only reproach that I feel inclined to level at Morand is that sometimes the images he uses are not quite inevitable. Now, an image that is merely approximate is a failure. Water

<sup>1</sup> The three sections of Morand's book (*Translator*)



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(in given conditions) boils at a temperature of 100 degrees. At 98 or 99 the phenomenon does not occur. In such cases it is better to do without any images at all. Set somebody in front of a piano for six months on end, someone who knows nothing of Wagner or of Beethoven; let him try every possible chance combination of notes on the keyboard; his fumbling will never produce the Spring theme from *Die Walküre* or the pre-Mendelssohnian (or, rather, infinitely super-Mendelssohnian) phrase from the 15th Quartet. Similarly, one might, during his life-time, have reproached Péguy with always trying to say one thing in six different ways, whereas there is only one way of saying one thing. But the glory of his heroic death has wiped away all blemishes.

It seems that, so far, it is in the palaces of France and of other countries, built by architects far inferior to Daedalus, that our Minotaur, Morand, has threaded the complications of his 'vast retreat'—as Phèdre says in the scene to which I made reference a while back. From there he keeps his watch on young women in tea gowns with loose sleeves like wings, and sees them foolishly descend into his Labyrinth. I know these palaces no better than he does, and should be of little use to him as a guide through their 'unsure bewilderments'. But if, before he becomes an ambassador, and so competes with Beyle, the Consul, he would like to pay a visit to the Hotel at Balbec, I will gladly put into his hand the magic clue.

*C'est moi, prince, c'est moi dont l'utile secours  
Vous a du Labyrinthe enseigné les détours.*

## ABOUT FLAUBERT'S STYLE

I HAVE only just read (which explains why I have been unable to embark on a serious study of the subject) the article which the distinguished critic of *La Nouvelle Revue Française* has recently published on 'Flaubert's Style'. I am, I confess, amazed to find him treating as one but little gifted for literature, a man who, by the entirely novel and personal use which he made of the past definite, the past indefinite, the present participle, and of certain pronouns and prepositions, has renewed our vision of things almost to the same extent as Kant, with his Categories, renewed our theories of knowledge and of the reality of the external world.<sup>1</sup> It is not that I am particularly enamoured of Flaubert's style, as we find it in his various books. For reasons which I have not room to develop here, I believe that metaphor alone can give a species of eternity to style, and there is probably, in the whole of Flaubert, no single instance of a really beautiful metaphor. I would go even further and maintain that his images are, generally speaking, so weak that they scarcely rise above the level of those that his most insignificant characters might have used. No doubt, when, in a sublime scene, Madame Arnoux and Frédéric exchange phrases of this kind: *'Quelquefois vos paroles me reviennent comme un écho lointain, comme le son d'une cloche apporté par le*

<sup>1</sup> I am well aware that it was Descartes who set the ball rolling with his 'common sense', which meant no less than rational principles. So much we learned at school. But how comes it that Monsieur Reinach who, at least in this, differs from the Bourbon emigrés, that he has learned everything and forgotten nothing, does not realise this truth, and can maintain that Descartes showed a vein of 'delicious irony' when he said that 'common sense' was the most widely shared of all human qualities? All Descartes meant was that, no matter how stupid a man may be, he cannot help having a sense of causality, etc. But the writers of the French seventeenth century could utter profound truths in very simple language. When I, in my novels, do my best to learn in their school, the philosophers reproach me with using such words as 'intelligence' etc, in the popular and current sense.



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*vent—j'avais toujours au fond de moi-même la musique de votre voix et la splendeur de vos yeux'*—no doubt, for a conversation between Madame Arnoux and Frédéric, it is rather too much of a good thing; but had it been Flaubert speaking in his own person, and not through the mouths of his characters, he would not have managed much better. When, in the most perfect of all his books, he wants to give what he obviously thinks is a ravishing description of the silence which reigned in Julien's castle, he says: *'Ton entendait le frôlement d'une écharpe ou l'écho d'un soupir'*. At the very end, when the man whom Saint Julien is carrying becomes the Christ, that ineffable moment is described more or less as follows: *'Ses yeux prirent une clarté d'étoiles, ses cheveux s'allongèrent comme les rais du soleil, le souffl de ses narines avait la douceur des roses, etc.'* There is nothing actually bad about it, nothing incongruous, shocking or ridiculous, as there quite often is in a descriptive passage by Balzac or Renan—it is just that, well, that a mere Frédéric Moreau, without any Flaubert to help him, might have managed just about as well. But, after all, there are other things in style besides metaphor. It would be impossible for anyone to get on to the great Moving Staircase of Flaubert's pages, which go on and on, never stopping, never breaking their monotony, without colour and without clearness of outline—and not to realise that they are without their like in literature. I do not intend to say anything about the mistakes due merely to carelessness, nor even about problems of grammatical correctness. Good grammar is a useful but a negative virtue (an intelligent schoolboy, set down to read Flaubert's proofs, could have spotted quite a number of faults). But there is such a thing as *beauty* of grammar (as there is moral beauty, or dramatic beauty) which has nothing whatever to do with correctness. It is of such beauty that Flaubert must have been brought painfully to bed. No doubt, this particular form of beauty may sometimes consist in the use of certain syntactical rules. Flaubert was always delighted when he could find in writers of past ages an anticipation of—Flaubert: for instance, in Montesquieu: *'Les vices d'Alexandre étaient extrêmes comme ses*

*vertus; il était terrible dans la colère; elle le rendit cruel.* But if Flaubert took pleasure in such phrases, it was not, I need scarcely point out, because of their correctness, but because, by setting the root of a flying arch fast in the heart of one statement, and letting its other end touch earth in the middle of another, they guaranteed a narrow and closed continuity of style. To attain this end, Flaubert often made use of the rules that govern the employment of the personal pronoun, though when this particular exigency was absent, he was capable of treating those same rules with complete indifference. Thus, on the second or third page of *Education Sentimentale*, we find him using '*il*' to designate Frédéric Moreau, when, by rights, it *should* refer back to Frédéric's uncle, and for Arnoux when it ought to belong to Frédéric. Further on, the '*ils*' which grammatically refer to '*hats*' are used in connection with persons, etc. These recurrent faults are almost as frequent in Saint-Simon. But, on the second page of *Education*, where it is a question of knitting two paragraphs closely together so that the particular quality of the vision which they record shall not be interrupted, the personal pronoun is, so to speak, by a reverse process, employed with absolute grammatical strictness, because there the writer is concerned with the different *parts* of a picture and wants to emphasise his characteristic rhythm:

*La colline qui suivait à droite le cours de la Seine s'abaissa, et il en surgit une autre, plus proche, sur la rive opposée.*

*Des arbres la couronnaient, etc.*

What tended to matter more and more to Flaubert, as his personality took form and became recognisably Flaubert, was the rendering of his vision without the slightest intervention of merely neat phrasing, or a hint of personal sensibility. In *Madame Bovary* the elements which are not wholly 'him' have not yet been completely eliminated. The final words, '*Il vient de recevoir la croix d'honneur*', remind one of the conclusion of *Le Gendre de Monsieur Poirier*: '*Pair de France en '48.*'



Even in *Education Sentimentale* (the very title achieves a certain beauty by reason of its solidity, and, incidentally, might equally well apply to *Madame Bovary*—though it is not absolutely correct from the purely grammatical point of view), there are occasional traces of something that is not Flaubert, ('*sa pauvre petite gorge*', etc). But, in spite of that, in *Education Sentimentale* the revolution has been accomplished, and what, up to the time of Flaubert, had been merely action, has become impression. Objects have just as much life as men, for it is the process of reasoning that, at a later stage, attributes external causes to visual phenomena. What reaches us in the form of a first impression contains no causal implication. Let me go back, for a moment, to that phrase on the second page of *Education Sentimentale* of which I was speaking a while back: '*La colline qui suivait à droite le cours de la Seine s'abaissa, et il en surgit une autre, plus proche, sur la rive opposée.*' Jacques Blanche has said that, in the history of painting, the coming of something new, the appearance of an invention, is often revealed in a mere relation of tones, in the effect produced by the juxtaposition of two colours. The subjective quality in Flaubert expresses itself by a novel employment of *tenses*, prepositions, adverbs—the two latter having, as a rule, merely a rhythmic value in his sentences. A continuous state is expressed by the use of the imperfect. The whole of the second page of *Education* (I have chosen that particular page purely at random) is entirely made up of imperfects, except where the narrative changes direction, and an action intervenes, an action in which the protagonists are, generally speaking, *things* ('*la colline s'abaissa*', etc). But a moment later the imperfect resumes its sway: '*Plus d'un enviait d'en être le propriétaire*', etc. But, quite often, the passage of the imperfect to the perfect is indicated by a present participle, which is used to show the manner in which action occurs. On that same second page of *Education* we find: '*Il contemplait des clochers*', etc, and, shortly afterwards, '*Paris disparaissant, il poussa un gros soupir.*' (I have chosen a bad example. There are many far more significant ones in Flaubert.) It should be noted, in passing,

that this activity of *things*, of animals—when they stand in the position of *subjects* (instead of human beings), necessitates a great variety of verbs. I have taken the following passage at random, and considerably shortened it: '*Les hyènes marchaient derrière lui, le taureau balançait la tête, tandis que la panthère bombant son dos avançait à pas de velours, etc . . . Le serpent sifflait, les bêtes puantes bavaient, le sanglier, etc . . . Pour l'attaque du sanglier il y avait quarante griffons, etc . . . Des mâlins de Barbarie . . . étaient destinés à poursuivre les aurochs. La robe noire des épagneuls luisait comme du satin, le jappements des talbots valait celui des bugles chanteurs*', etc. And this variety of verbs envelopes even the men who, in this continuous and homogeneous vision, are no more important than things, but no less: '*une illusion à décrire*'. Thus: '*Il aurait voulu courir dans le désert après les autruches, être caché dans les bambous à l'affût des léopards, traverser des forêts pleines de rhinocéros, atteindre au sommet des monts pour viser les aigles et sur les glaçons de la mer combattre les ours blancs. Il se voyait*', etc. This eternal imperfect (I hope I may be allowed to qualify as 'eternal' a past definite, seeing that, for the most part, the word eternal is used by journalists to indicate not—and quite rightly—a love affair, but a silk scarf or an umbrella: '*Avec son éternel foulard*'—and we are lucky if it does not become: '*avec son foulard légendaire*'. In fact, the adjective is now consecrated by custom)—this eternal imperfect, then, partly composed of the speech of his characters, which Flaubert habitually reports indirectly so as to avoid breaking the general tone of a passage (*l'Etat devait s'emparer de la Bourse. Bien d'autres mesures étaient bonnes encore. Il fallait d'abord passer le niveau sur la tête des riches. Tout était tranquille maintenant. Il fallait que les nourrices et les accoucheuses fussent salariées par l'Etat. Dix-mille citoyennes avec de bons fusils pouvaient fair trembler l'Hôtel de Ville. . .*)—all this does not mean that Flaubert thought and affirmed these things, but that Frédéric, la Vatnaz or Sénécale said them, and that Flaubert had determined to make as little use as possible of inverted commas)—this imperfect, a newcomer to litera-



ture, entirely changes the look of people and of things, as, when the position of a lamp has been slightly shifted, the appearance of a new house may strike one as one enters it for the first time, or of an old one when one is in the process of moving. It is this kind of melancholy, made up of the breaking of old habits and of the flimsy unreality of the setting, that Flaubert's style produces, that style which, if only by reason of this single effect, strikes one as being so new. His use of the imperfect serves to narrate not only people's words, but their whole lives. *Education Sentimentale* is the prolonged narrative of a life, in which the human characters, so to speak, do not play any active part at all.<sup>1</sup> Sometimes there is an incursion of the perfect into the clutter of imperfects, but when that happens, it, too, seems merely to mark something indefinite in process of prolongation: '*Il voyagea, il connut la mélancolie des paquebots,*' etc . . . '*Il eut d'autres amours encore.*' And here, as the result of a sort of general-post, it is the imperfect that takes over the function of giving some small degree of precision: '*mais la violence du premier les lui rendait insipides.*' There are, indeed, moments when the present indicative applies a corrective to the movement of the phrases down the inclined plane of these neutrally tinted imperfects, and casts a furtive beam of sunlight, which has the effect of picking out a more durable reality from the unceasing flow of objects: '*Ils habitaient le fond de la Bretagne . . . C'était une maison basse, avec un jardin montant jusqu'au haut de la colline d'où on découvre la mer.*'

The conjunction 'and' never, in Flaubert, plays the part assigned to it by grammar. It marks a pause in the beat of the rhythm, and acts as the means of dividing a picture into its parts. It is true to say that wherever one would normally

<sup>1</sup> One is often tempted to apply to this book—though it was—as I need hardly point out—no part of Flaubert's intention that one should—a phrase that occurs on its fourth page: 'The general vague air of boredom which enveloped everything seemed to make the people there look more than ever insignificant.'

put 'and', Flaubert suppresses it. This suppression provides the model, the form, of many admirable phrases: '*(Et) les Celtes regrettaient trois pierres brutes, sous un ciel pluvieux, dans un golfe rempli d'îlots*' [the word may be *semé*, not *rempli*: I quote from memory]. '*C'était à Mégara, faubourg de Carthage, dans les jardins d'Hamilcar*'. . . . '*Le père et la mère de Julien habitaient un château au milieu des bois, sur la pente d'une colline*.' The variety of prepositions, to be sure, adds to the beauty of these ternary phrases. But in others, of a different form, there is never an 'and'. I have already quoted (for other reasons) the following: '*Il voyagea, il connut la mélancolie des paquebots, les froids réveils sous la tente, l'étourdissement des paysages et des ruines, l'amertume des sympathies interrompues*.' But the '*et*' which there occurs ill suits Flaubert's massive rhythm. In revenge, he makes use of it where no one else would have dreamed of doing so. It functions more or less as a sign that another part of the picture is beginning, that the moving wave is about to build itself up again. Let me quote at random from a memory that has chosen with indifferent skill: '*La place du Carrousel avait un aspect tranquille. L'Hôtel de Nantes s'y dressait toujours solitairement; et les maisons par derrière, le dôme du Louvre en face, la longue galerie de bois, à droite, etc . . . étaient comme noyés dans le couleur grise, de l'air, etc . . . tandis que, à l'autre bout de la place, etc*'. Briefly, 'and' in Flaubert always begins a secondary phrase, and scarcely ever terminates an enumeration. (It should be noted, by the way, that the words '*tandis que*' in the above quotation have—and it is always so in Flaubert—no temporal implication, but contribute to one of those rather simple-minded artifices used by all descriptive writers when they find a phrase becoming too long, but do not wish to separate the various parts of their picture. I could point out a similar rôle played in Leconte de Lisle by such phrases as '*non loin*', '*plus loin*', '*au fond*', '*plus bas*', '*seuls*', etc. The very slow process—and that it was slow I am ready to admit—of acquiring so many grammatical peculiarities (I have no space in which to indicate the most important—but my readers will be able to find them for themselves without



any help from me) proves, in my opinion, not, as the critic of *La Nouvelle Revue Française* would have us believe, that Flaubert was not a born writer, but, rather that he was. Since these grammatical singularities were, in fact, the means by which he registered a new vision, it must have needed an enormous amount of application to fix the contours of that vision, to make it pass from the unconscious into the conscious, to incorporate it in the various parts of his narrative. The only thing that really surprises me in so great a master is the mediocrity of his letters. As a rule, great writers who do not know how to write (like great painters who do not know how to paint) do little more than renounce their 'virtuosity', their inborn 'facility', in order to create, as a medium for their new vision, ways of expressing themselves which, little by little, adapt themselves to its requirements. Now, in their letters, where the need to submit unquestioningly to their own obscure inner ideal is absent, they become once more what, had they been less great, they would never have ceased to be. How often does one hear women deploring the works of some writer whom they may happen to number among their friends: 'I wish you could see the *enchanting* little notes he writes when he lets himself go! His letters are infinitely superior to his books.' To make a display of eloquence, brilliance, wit, firmness of touch, is child's play for a man who usually lacks these literary qualities merely because he has to model himself on the lines laid down by a tyrannical reality which will not allow him to deviate by one jot or tittle from the rules it has imposed. This sudden, and apparent 'heightening' which takes hold of a writer's talent so soon as he begins to improvise (or of a painter who 'does' an Ingres drawing in the album of some lady who knows nothing about pictures)—this sort of 'heightening' ought, by rights, to be noticeable in Flaubert's letters. But what we find is something very much more like a 'lowering'. This anomaly is complicated by the fact that every great artist whose deliberate intention it is to let the inner reality come to a spontaneous blossoming in his books, thereby cuts himself off from any conscious display, so far as they are concerned, of intelligent

direction or critical commentary, considering both to be beneath the dignity of his genius. What is thus missing from his 'work' tends to overflow into his conversation and his letters. But nothing of the sort is apparent in the case of Flaubert. I find it impossible to agree with Monsieur Thibaudet that Flaubert's letters 'give evidence of a brain of the very front rank'. But it is the letters, rather than Monsieur Thibaudet's view of them, that I find disconcerting. Since, however, we get to grips with Flaubert's genius only in the beauty of his conscious style and in the curiously rigid singularities of his distorting syntax, it may be well to point out a few more of them, such, for instance, as the way in which he constantly uses an adverb to conclude, not only a phrase, or a paragraph, but even a whole book: (take, for instance, the culmination of *Hérodias*: '*Comme elle était très lourde [the head of St John] ils la portaient alternativement*'). With him, as with Leconte de Lisle, we feel the need of a certain solidity, even of a somewhat massive solidity to act as compensation for the—I don't say hollow, but certainly very light writing, in which too many interstices, too many gaps, have been allowed to show. But in Flaubert, adverbs and adverbial locutions, are always placed in the ugliest, the most unexpected, the heaviest, manner, as though they are intended to serve as cement for his compact phrases, so that each tiniest hole in the fabric shall be efficiently blocked. Monsier Homais says: '*Vos chevaux peut-être, sont fougueux*': Hussonet: '*il serait temps peut-être, d'aller instruire les populations*' . . . '*Paris, bientôt, serait*', etc. Such words as '*après tout*', '*cependant*', '*au moins*', are always placed where nobody else but Flaubert would have placed them, whether in speaking or in writing: '*Une lampe en forme de colombe brûlait dessus continuellement.*' For the same reason, he is never afraid of the *weight* of certain words, or of certain rather vulgar expressions. (In contrast to the great variety of his verbs, to which I earlier drew attention, '*avoir*', so solid in itself, is constantly employed where an inferior writer would have sought greater subtlety of effect: '*Les maisons avaient des jardins en pente*' . . . '*Les quatre tours avaient des toits pointus*'). It may be said of all



great inventors in matters of art, at least in the nineteenth century, that no matter how earnestly the critics may stress their contacts with the past, the public, as a whole, found them vulgar. No matter how much one may insist that Manet, Renoir (who is being buried tomorrow) or Flaubert were, not so much innovators as the last heirs of Velasquez, Goya, Boucher, Fragonard—even of Rubens, Greek antiquity, Bossuet and Voltaire—the fact remains that their contemporaries found them rather common, though one is tempted to wonder what, precisely, they meant by the word ‘common’. When Flaubert says: *‘Une telle confusion d’images l’étourdissait, bien qu’il y trouvât du charme, pourtant’*; when Frédéric Moreau, in the company, whether of La Maréchale or of Madame Arnoux, *‘se met à leur dire des tendresses’*, we certainly do not feel that the *‘pourtant’* is graceful, or that *‘se mettre à dire des tendresses’* has an air of distinction. Nevertheless, we love these hard, solid blocks of material which Flaubert raises and lets fall with the intermittent thud of a steam-shovel. For if, as I found recounted in some book or other, the sailors at sea used to catch the glow of Flaubert’s lamp as he worked through the night, and take their bearings from it, as if from a lighthouse beam, so too, it might be said that when he ‘unloaded’ a good round phrase, it had the regular rhythm of one of those machines used in excavating. Happy are those who can feel the beat of this obsessive rhythm: but those who can never get it out of their system, who, no matter what the subject about which they may be writing, are ceaselessly dominated by the master’s spell, and go on producing ‘pure Flaubert’, are like those wretched victims in Germanic folk-lore, who are condemned to drag out their lives bound to the clapper of a bell.

While I am on the subject of Flaubert’s ‘spell’, let me say that the best advice I can give to my fellow-writers, is that they would be well advised to indulge in the cleansing, exorcising, pastime of parody. When we come to the end of a book, we find that not only do we want to go on living with its characters, with Madame de Beauséant, with Frédéric Moreau, etc, but that our own inner voice, which has grown accustomed,

through the long hours of perusal, to follow the Balzacian or Flaubertian rhythm, insists on talking just like those authors. The one means of escape from the toils lies in letting the influence have its way for a while, in keeping one's foot on the pedal and permitting the resonance to continue: in other words, in embarking upon a deliberate act of parody, with the object, once we have got the stuff out of our system, of becoming ourselves again, instead of spending the rest of our working lives producing *unconscious* parodies. But deliberate parody must be spontaneous. When I set about producing my own, rather detestable, parody of Flaubert, I did not stop to ask myself whether the 'tune' ringing in my ears owed its peculiar quality to a recurrent series of imperfects or of present participles. If I had bothered about that, I should never have got the thing on paper at all. But now, as I hastily jot down these few comments on the characteristics of Flaubert's style, I am operating a reverse process. The human mind can never be satisfied unless it can manage to achieve a clear analysis of what, at the moment of composition, it produced unconsciously, or can re-create in vital terms what, till then, it has been merely analysing. I could go on talking for ever about Flaubert's merits as a writer, though today they find little favour in literary circles. The one which touches me most nearly, because I find in it the successful solution of certain problems to which I have, in my own modest fashion, devoted a good deal of thought, is the masterly manner in which he managed to produce the effect of time *passing*. The finest thing, to my mind, in the whole of *Education Sentimentale*, is to be found, not in words at all, but in a passage where there comes a sudden moment of silence. Flaubert has just been describing, narrating, through many pages, the various trivial acts performed by Frédéric Moreau. His hero sees a policeman, with sword drawn, rush at a rioter who promptly falls dead: '*Et Frédéric, béant, reconnut Sénécal!*' Here there is an implied 'silence' of vast duration, and suddenly, without the hint of a transition, time ceases to be a matter of mere successive quarters of an hour, and appears to us in the guise of years and decades (I repeat



## ABOUT FLAUBERT'S STYLE

the final words, which I have already quoted, in order to demonstrate this extraordinary change of tempo, for which nothing in the preceding lines has prepared us):

*'Et Frédéric, béant, reconnut Sénécal.'*

*'Il voyagea, il connut la mélancolie des paquebots, les froids réveils sous la tente, etc . . . Il revient . . .*

*Il fréquenta le monde, etc . . .*

*Vers la fin de l'année 1867', etc . . .*

I know that, in Balzac, we frequently find such phrases as *'En 1817 les Séchard étaient'*, etc, but with him the change of tempo has an active and documentary character. Flaubert was the first novelist to free this change from all parasitic growths of anecdote and historical scavenging. He treated it in terms of music. Nobody before him had ever done that.

If I have written at such length in defence (using that word in the sense given to it by Joachim de Bellay) of Flaubert, who is not one of my favourites; if I have deprived myself of a good deal of pleasure in not writing of many authors whom I prefer to him, the reason is this, that I have a feeling that we have lost the art of reading.<sup>1</sup> Monsieur Daniel Halévy has recently contributed to the *Debats* an excellent article on Sainte-Beuve's centenary. But it seems to me unfortunate that he should refer to Sainte-Beuve as one of the 'great guides' now lost to us.

<sup>1</sup> I would make an exception in favour of certain great systematic treatises in which we should not normally expect to find literary criticism. A new stream of literary criticism has begun to flow from *Heredo* and from *Monde des Images*, those two admirable and very important books by Monsieur Léon Daudet, with an effect comparable to that of a new Cartesian Physics, a new Cartesian system of Medicine. No doubt, Monsieur Léon Daudet's profound views on Molière, Hugo, Baudelaire and other writers, show as even finer if we connect them, by the laws of gravitation, with those Spheres which are, in fact, the Images. But, in themselves, and viewed in detachment from the wider system, they offer sound proof of the vitality and depth of our literary taste.

(Having neither books nor papers available when I was scribbling this essay 'against time', I cannot vouch for Halévy's actual words, but the sense of what he wrote is as I have given it.) Now, I have more than once debauched myself by indulging in the delicious but shoddy music of Sainte-Beuve's florid conversational style, but surely, no one ever failed so completely as did he in performing the functions of a guide? The greater part of his *Lundis* are devoted to fourth-rate writers, and whenever, by chance, he does bring himself to speak of somebody really important, of Flaubert, for instance, or Baudelaire, he immediately atones for what grudging praise he may have accorded to them, by letting it be understood that he writes as he does about them simply because he wants to please men who are his personal friends. It is simply and solely in this way, as personal friends, that he mentions the Goncourts who, whatever one may think of them, are infinitely superior to the general run of authors for whom Sainte-Beuve habitually expresses admiration. Gérard de Nerval, who was, without a shadow of doubt, one of the three or four really great writers of the nineteenth century, is patronisingly dismissed as 'that nice fellow Nerval', and only mentioned at all, in connection with a translation of Goethe. Sainte-Beuve seems to be quite unaware that he produced work of his own. As to Stendhal, the novelist, the Stendhal of *La Chartreuse*, our 'guide' laughs out of court the idea that such a person ever existed, and merely sees in all the talk about him the disastrous effects of an attempt (foredoomed to failure) to foist Stendhal on the public as a novelist, much as the fame of certain painters seems to be due merely to the speculative activities of art dealers. It is true that Balzac, while Stendhal was still alive, paid tribute to his genius, but that, we are led to suppose, was on the basis of 'something for something'. Why, the author himself (according to Sainte-Beuve, who gives a very one-sided interpretation of a letter of which this is not the place to speak) admitted that he had got more than a fair return for his money. It would be fun, had I not less important things to do, to 'brush in' (as Monsieur Cuvillier Fleury would have said), in the manner of



Sainte-Beuve, a 'Picture of French Literature in the nineteenth century', in such a way that not a single great name would appear, and men would be promoted to the position of outstanding authors whose books today have been completely forgotten. It is open to everybody to make mistakes, and the objective value of our artistic judgments have no very great importance. Flaubert cruelly underestimated Stendhal, and Stendhal himself regarded our loveliest Romanesque churches as hideous, and laughed at Balzac. But the error of which Sainte-Beuve is guilty is far more serious, because he was forever maintaining that it is easy to appraise at their true worth writers like Virgil and La Bruyère, long recognised and duly classified, but that the really difficult, the true function of criticism, that by virtue of which it deserves the name of criticism, consist in establishing the hierarchy of contemporaries. It is important to realise that he himself never once did this, and that fact alone is enough to justify us in refusing to think of him as a guide. Perhaps this same article of Monsieur Halévy's—which, by the way, is a remarkable piece of work—might make it possible for me, if I had it by me at this moment, to demonstrate that it is not only prose that we no longer know how to read, but verse as well. Its author recalls two lines by Sainte-Beuve. The first should be attributed to Monsieur André Rivoire rather than to Sainte-Beuve: the second:

*Sorrente m'a rendu mon doux rêve infini*

is hideous if one slurs it, absurd if one rolls the r's. Generally speaking, the deliberate repetition of a vowel or a consonant can produce magnificent effects (Racine: *Iphigénie*, *Phèdre*). There is a labial which, repeated six times in one of Hugo's lines, gives precisely that impression of airy lightness at which the poet was aiming:

*Les souffles de la nuit flottaient sur Galgala.*

Hugo could even make use of the recurrent 'r', which, in French, produces a discordant effect. He introduced it with the

happiest results, but the conditions under which he did so were very different from those that controlled Sainte-Beuve's similar attempt.

Still, whatever may be said of verse, it is certainly true that we have forgotten how to read prose. In his article on Flaubert's style, Monsieur Thibaudet, as a rule so erudite and shrewd where reading is concerned, quotes a phrase from Chateaubriand. Now, Chateaubriand is almost too rich in thrilling passages, but Monsieur Thibaudet, wishing, it is true, to show how the use of the anacoluthon can lighten a sentence, quotes one of the least good, one of those in which Chateaubriand shows as less than eloquent, and the dulness of which my distinguished fellow-writer might have guessed from the fact that Monsieur Guizot used to take peculiar pleasure in declaiming it. As a general rule, everything in Chateaubriand which preserves or anticipates the political eloquence of the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries, is not Chateaubriand at his most characteristic. It is our duty to be scrupulous and conscientious when we set ourselves to appraise different works by the same author. In view of the fact that Musset, year by year, and branch by branch, clambered up the tree of his output until he reached *Nuits*, and, similarly with Molière, until he reached *Le Misanthrope*, is it not an act of cruelty on our part to prefer to the first, lines like:

*A Saint Blaise, à la Zuecca*  
*Nous étions, nous étions bien aise,*

and, to the second, *Les Fourberies de Scapin*? If only we would read the masters with more simplicity, Flaubert among the rest, we should be astonished to find how vital they remain, how close to us; how they offer a thousand successful examples of just that effort we have failed to make. Flaubert chose Maître Sénard to defend him at his trial: he might equally well have invoked the deafening and disinterested testimony of the great army of the dead. May I, finally, quote as an example of this truth that the great writers of all times are for ever our champions, something that concerns me personally? Certain readers, some of them very literary readers, quite failing to see



what a rigorous (though obscure) design there is in the composition of *Du Côté de Chez Swann* (less easily discernible, perhaps, than it might be, because the scale of my whole work is large, and, in the symmetrical fragment of a fragment, there is bound to be an overlarge distance separating cause from effect), concluded that my novel was nothing but a collection of memories linked by the purely fortuitous laws which control the association of ideas. In support of this view—which is very far from the truth—they have quoted certain passages in which I describe how a few scraps of *madeleine* soaked in tea, brought back to me (or, rather to the narrator who, though he uses the first person singular, is not always I) a whole period of my life which, in the first part of the work, I had entirely forgotten. Leaving aside, for the moment, all question of the value I attach to such unconscious memories, on which, in the final volume—not yet published—I base my whole theory of art, let me concentrate attention on the purely compositional aspect of the matter, and point out that, in order to pass from one plane to another, I make use, not of 'fact', but of something in which I find a greater degree of purity and significance, as a link—namely, a phenomenon of memory. Now, open the *Mémoires d'Outre-Tombe*, or Gérard de Nerval's *Filles du Feu*, and you will find that two great writers, whom it is the fashion to impoverish and devitalise by applying to them an over-formal interpretation, were perfectly familiar with this method of sudden transition. When Chateaubriand finds himself—if my memory is not at fault—at Montboisier, he suddenly hears a thrush singing. And this bird-note which he had so often heard in childhood, takes his mind back at once to Combours, and urges him, and the reader with him, to submit to a change both of time and place. Similarly, the first part of *Sylvie* takes place in front of a stage setting, and describes the love felt by Gérard de Nerval for an actress. Suddenly, he sees a playbill 'Tomorrow. *Les Archers de Loisy*', etc. These words evoke a memory, or rather two memories, of sentimental episodes in his childhood, and at once the setting of his new 'affair' is changed. This phenomenon of memory has served Nerval in the

guise of a transition point. Nerval was a great genius, all of whose work might have had as title the words which I have given to one of my sections, *Les Intermittences du Cœur*. But for him, I shall be told, they had quite a different significance, because, after all, he was mad. But if one looks at the matter from the point of view of the literary critic, one cannot, strictly, use the word 'madness' of a state of mind which makes possible the true perception (or, better still, readjusts and sharpens the exploratory sense) of the most important relations subsisting between ideas and images. This 'madness' is, really, nothing but the moment at which Gérard de Nerval's habitual day-dreams become ineffable. His 'madness', is, as it were, a prolongation of his work, from which he escapes in order to resume the task of writing. The 'madness' which was the *terminus ad quem* of the book just finished, becomes the point of departure, the very matter, of the book about to be begun. The poet is no more ashamed of the mental attack now over and done with than are we embarrassed when we wake each morning faced by the knowledge that we have spent the night in sleep, or than, perhaps, we shall feel confused when we come to realise, some day, that we have made the momentary passage of death. What he does is to try to classify and describe his various dreams.

We have travelled far from the style of *Madame Bovary* and *Education Sentimentale*. In view of the haste with which this essay has been written, I ask the reader to overlook the faults of my own.

*Nouvelle Revue Française*, January 1920



## PREFACE

TO JACQUES EMILE BLANCHE'S

*PROPOS DE PEINTRE : DE DAVID A DEGAS*<sup>1</sup>

JACQUES BLANCHE has invoked the spirit of Auteuil, which was the scene of my childhood and of his youth.<sup>2</sup> I fully understand his pleasure in letting his mind make the backward journey. We all of us feel the pull of what has migrated from the visible world to the invisible, of what, transmuted into memories, gives a sort of plus-value to our thoughts, so that they can find shelter, once more, in the shadows of long-vanished elms. But Auteuil holds a particular interest for me as being a tiny spot in the vast expanse of earth, which I was in a position to observe at two distinct periods—now long past—of its passage through Time.

Between then and now, Auteuil, though it may seem not to have moved at all, has actually travelled through a period of twenty years, in which time Jacques Emile Blanche has won fame as a painter, while I, in the near-by gardens, and on the brink of ancient fountains, have merely succeeded in catching hay-fever. Everything that Blanche—in a series of pages which are remarkable for their intelligence and for the tone of melancholy that suffuses them—says about Manet—that Manet whom his

<sup>1</sup> This preface is reprinted in translation by kind permission of the publishers, Émile Paul Freres, 14 rue de l'Abbaye, Paris VI (publishers' note)

<sup>2</sup> It is relevant to the opening lines of this Preface to point out that Blanche's book contains the following Dedication:

*Ce livre est dédié à Marcel Proust en souvenir  
de l'Auteuil de son enfance et de ma jeunesse et  
comme un hommage d'admiration pour l'auteur de 'Du Côté  
de Chez Swann' (Translator)*

friends found charming, but did not take seriously, did not know that 'he had it in him'—I saw happening to Blanche himself. True, the social background was not the same, and his elegance has given a different form to the misunderstanding—fundamentally, the same misunderstanding—which always arises between those who, in spite of themselves, can 'see' nothing but the painting of yesterday, and the creators of works which will be worthy of the past because they begin their lives by being situated in the future; of works, that is, at which one must try to look down the perspective of the years that they anticipate, bringing that modification of the sensibilities for the development of which it is time, precisely, that is needed.

Often, while Jacques Blanche was painting, some lovely lady, crowned with flowers, would stop her victoria in front of his studio. She would get out, take a look at what he was doing, and fondly imagine that she was expressing informed criticism of the result. How was it possible for her to believe that a masterpiece was taking shape beneath the fingers of a man who was so well-dressed, with whom she had dined the evening before, who had shown such a gift for subtle conversation, and who enjoyed the reputation of having a 'wicked tongue'? Oddly enough, the proverb which says that 'No man is a hero to his valet', is false. It should be corrected to read: 'No man is a hero to his hosts—or to his guests.' As to the wicked tongue—well, speaking personally, I always found Blanche to be a man with a great heart and a sense of justice which nothing ever ruffled. The wicked tongue, however—or what passed for such—was not without its uses to him, and if he was in part to blame for the acquisition of that particular reputation, let me say, as Renan was so fond of saying, *Felix Culpa*. Blanche's chief danger lay in the possibility that, being both elegant and witty, he might fritter away his life in treading the social round. But Nature, which can invent, in cases of need, protective neuroses and guardian misfortunes, so that it may ensure a special gift's continued productivity, saw to it that this reputation for scandal-mongering should quickly bring about a break



## PREFACE TO PROPOS DE PEINTRE

between him and the people who might have prevented him from painting, and that, on days when he would far rather have gone to a garden party, he should be pushed forcibly back into his studio. In fact, Nature behaved with all the ruthlessness of Baudelaire's Angel:

*Car je suis ton bon ange, entends-tu, je le veux.*

If only we knew better than we do how to disentangle those 'mysterious knots of which man's miseries are part', it would soon become clear to us how much more in life we owe to the disagreeable, than to the agreeable, things. This time, the last word does lie with a proverb, that proverb which states, with the directness characteristic of all gnomonic wisdom, that 'It's an ill wind . . .'

I cannot accurately remember whether it was in the incomparable Salon conducted by Madame Strauss, or in those of the Princesse Mathilde or Madame Baignières, that I first met Jacques Blanche, about the time when I was doing my military service, in other words, during my early twenties. Wherever that event may have taken place, it was in those three Salons that I saw him most frequently, and the pencil study for a portrait in oils which he afterwards did of me, was made one evening before dinner, at Trouville in the charming house known as 'Les Frémonts', where Madame Arthur Baignières was then living, and up the hill to which, from the Manoir des Roches or the Villa Persane, would climb the Marquise de Galliflet—my hostess's first cousin—accompanied by the Princesse de Sagan, both of them elegantly gowned in a fashion which, today, it is impossible to describe, and looking like old beauties of the Empire.

Since my parents regularly passed the spring and early summer at Auteuil, where Jacques Blanche lived all the year round, it was easy for me to sit for my portrait in the mornings. At that time the very tall house which has since been built over the studio, like a cathedral constructed on top of the crypt of an earlier church, was a sprawling affair set in beautiful gardens, and, when the sittings were over, I used to go to

luncheon with Dr Blanche, who, from professional habit, insisted on counselling me to keep calm and not to get excited. If ever it happened that I gave vent to some opinion which Jacques countered rather too vehemently, the doctor, an excellent scientist and the kindest of men, but accustomed to dealing with the insane, would sharply reprimand his son: 'Really, Jacques, you *must not* worry him and get him into a state—take it easy, my boy; keep quite quiet: he doesn't believe a word of what he's saying. Now then, sip a little cold water, and count up to a hundred.' At other times I would go to luncheon with my great-uncle, who lived closed by, and was (as Monsieur Bourget would say) a 'stage' less advanced in the social hierarchy than Monsieur and Madame Blanche, those two prominent members of the upper-middle class, whose unforgettable portrait by Jacques Emile Blanche himself bring to mind the Hospital Governors and their wives whom Hals delighted to paint. ('It is a popular and almost commonplace opinion that painters find in their mothers an unparalleled opportunity of expressing their own deepest selves'—he says in his essay on Whistler, which is the delicious and melancholy pearl of the present collection, a thing as light and iridescent as spun glass.)

The house which we shared with my uncle at Auteuil stood in a large garden which was cut in two when a new road (later the Avenue Mozart) was driven through the middle of it. It was about as tasteless as it could possibly be. Nevertheless, I can scarcely find words in which to express the pleasure I felt when, having walked the length of the Rue Lafontaine in dazzling sunshine, inhaling the scent of limes, I went up for a moment to my room where the unctuous atmosphere of a hot morning had, as it were, succeeded in varnishing and isolating, in the pearly half-light of the glazed and shiny curtains (very far from rural in material) of Empire-blue satin, the homely smells of soap and of the mirror-fronted wardrobe. When, after stumbling my way across the small drawing room, which was always kept hermetically closed against the heat, so that only a single ray of sunlight, motionless, entrancing, succeeded in anæsthetising the air, and the pantry where the



cider—which we drank from glasses so excessively thick that one wanted to bite them, much as one wants to bite certain types of women whose skin has a cushiony quality, when one kisses them—had grown so cold that, no sooner introduced into one's mouth, than it seemed to cling with a deep deliciousness, a complete adherence, to the sides of the cavity—I finally came to the dining room with its translucent and congealed atmosphere, which gave it the appearance of some immaterial agate veined by the fragrance of the cherries already piled high in the fruit dishes, and where the knives, in accordance with the terribly vulgar custom obtaining in middle-class households (but which I found enchanting) rested on small crystal prisms. The iridescent colours of these tiny objects did more than merely add a quality of mystery to the smell of gruyère and apricots. In the shadowed interior of the dining room, these rainbow knife-rests projected on to the walls reflections that resembled the eyes in peacocks' tails, and seemed to me as marvellous as the stained glass—recorded only in the tables and plates of Helleu's book—in the Cathedral of Rheims, in that Cathedral of Rheims which the barbarous Germans loved so well that, when they failed to take it by force, they must needs burn it. Alas! I could not foresee this hideous crime of passion, perpetrated upon the person of a Virgin in stone, and had no gift of prophesy, when I wrote *Death Comes to the Cathedrals*.<sup>1</sup>

Blanche says very amiably of Manet, and it is no less true of himself (it in part explains why it has taken so long for him to emerge from the category of 'gifted amateurs'), that he was modest, human and sensitive to criticism. It is necessary to insist on these simple qualities which, as a rule, go with talent and are largely responsible for the failure of the world to recognise it. In order to make it clear that (though, alas! not myself endowed with a compensating talent) I can very well

<sup>1</sup> I need scarcely say that I did not wait until Germany had been defeated to write these lines, which date from an earlier period. I have little sympathy with people who cry 'string him up' when they see a condemned criminal on his way to execution, nor is it my habit to insult my enemies once they are down.

understand this type of character which, in one form or another, was that of all the great artists who form the subjects of Jacques Blanche's articles collected in the present volume, let me say, giving free rein to my memories of the Auteuil of my youth, that, from temperament as well as training, I should have considered it as being in the worst possible taste to have made any display of those advantages, or so-called advantages, which my companions did not possess. Many a time, at the Saint-Lazare Station, when I happened to run into a crowd of students returning, like me, to Auteuil, did I blushingly conceal (so that they should not see it) my first-class ticket, and join them in their third-class compartment, with an expression intended to convey that I had never known any other way of travelling. For the same reason I made a point of hiding from them the fact that already, though, at this time, not very frequently, I was getting invited out. So successfully did I do this that they felt really sorry for me, because I 'knew nobody', and they would have experienced considerable embarrassment had they thought it likely that I might be seen by the people they thought of as being 'in the swim'. I remember how once, on leaving Blanche's studio, I went to look up one of these young men, who was, so it appeared, giving a party, though I did not know it. Hearing the bell, he came down in person to open the door, thinking, no doubt, that he would find one of his guests on the mat. But no sooner did he see me than he was seized by a mad terror lest some of his friends might be forced into meeting one who had no friends of his own, and, with the agility of a boxing-kangaroo, or of the 'buddy' in a farce who pushes the husband out of the room where his wife is closeted with her lover, rushed me downstairs as precipitately as I imagine the commander of a submarine evacuates the wretched passengers from a ship he has just torpedoed—exclaiming, 'Forgive me, old man, but really you can't stay here. I'm expecting the Dutilleuls!' I had no idea then, nor have I since learned, who the Dutilleuls might be, nor yet what catastrophic conflagration would have ensued had I met such glorious persons.



That same evening, I was due to go to a ball given by the Princesse Wagram. It had not occurred to my grandfather to take me with him in the carriage, and, in any case, he had left Auteuil too early, because, though he dined there every evening, he always made a point of returning to Paris to sleep. He had never spent a single day away from the city in the whole course of his eighty-five years (and this enables me to understand, far better than would any explanation, those sedentary habits of the middle class to which, as Jacques Blanche will explain, Fantin-Latour was so passionately, so insanely, attached)—with the single exception of one occasion, during the siege, when he had taken my grandmother to Etampes for safety. It was the only time in the whole course of his long life that he had made a move. Each evening on his way back to town, he used to pass the railway viaduct, and the sight of the trains that could take mad searchers after the unknown to stations beyond the 'Point du Jour', or 'Boulogne', gave him, sitting there in his brougham, an intense feeling of *Suave mari magno*.

'To think', he would exclaim, looking at the trains with mingled pity and terror, 'that there are actually people who *like* travelling!'

My parents were strongly of the opinion that a young man should not spend money unnecessarily. They had refused to let me use the family carriage (on the grounds that the horses were taken out at seven) for the purpose of going to Madame de Wagram's ball, and they would not even permit me the indulgence of a modest cab. My father declared that the obvious thing for me to do was to take the Auteuil-Madeleine bus which passed our door, and stopped in the Avenue de l'Alma where the Princess's house was situated. For 'buttonhole' I had to rest content with a rose from the garden innocent of all silver-paper frilling.

Unfortunately, the first person I saw when I got into the bus was the entertainer of the Dutilleuls. He excused himself, because of their magnificence, for the rather rough way in which he had treated me that afternoon, and fairly wriggled

with delight at the thought of his own claims to elegance. 'You see', he said, 'you don't know anybody; you never *go* anywhere. It really is very odd!' Suddenly, the collar of my overcoat fell open, displaying my white tie. 'Hullo!' he exclaimed, 'why are you all dressed up like that if you never go out?' After much beating about the bush, I had to admit that I was on my way to a ball. 'So you *do* go to balls,' he said, adding, without much show of pleasure, 'congratulations!—and might I be allowed to ask *what* ball?' More and more embarrassed, and wishing to shed, like a suit which one doesn't want to wear while it is looking too new, the glory that would have attached to the word 'Princesse', I murmured humbly, 'the Wagram ball'.

I did not then know of the existence of a dance that used to be given in the Salle Wagram, and was patronised by waiters and domestic servants. It was generally known as 'the Wagram ball'. 'Oh, well, it's quite a decent affair', said the friend of the Dutilleuls, once more restored to happiness. Then he added, with a severe expression: 'Dear old man, I don't think it's quite the thing to try to look like an invited guest when one knows so few people that one's reduced to going to servants' hops—and paying for one's ticket, too!'

The mere list of his portraits (with the exception of mine, which Jacques Blanche painted at this time) is, in itself, sufficient to show that, in literature too, it was the future that he was intent upon discovering, the future that he had taken as his chosen field, and this goes a long way to explain the extreme value, the unique charm, possessed by the present volume. The illustrious portraitists of a previous age—a Benjamin Constant, for instance—delineated only such writers as were already loaded with honours, and completely without merit—as wholly forgotten today as is the man who put them on record. Jacques Blanche, on the contrary, painted friends of whose talents he alone, or almost alone, was aware. People in the smart world said that he did this in order to be 'original', or, perhaps, because of a streak of perversity, so that having denigrated the prominent figures of the day, he found a devilish satisfaction



in exalting the members of the 'Incomprehensible School'. The truth of the matter was that Jacques Blanche happened to have—as do all those with a future before them—that sense of chronological perspective which is essential if we are to look at works of art properly. It is a fact that now, after the twenty years through which the Auteuil of his youth has passed, hostesses are only too glad to give the place of honour at their tables to many of the friends whom Jacques Blanche painted and flattered in those old days, men like Barrès, Henri de Régnier and André Gide. He has always, like Maurice Denis, professed a proper admiration for Gide, and, in addition, may I add, a deeply felt affection. As to his still-life studies, of which it was the fashion in those days to say: 'we've got to put it in a good light, just for now, because we've asked him in to make up an odd number. Tomorrow it'll go back where it can't be seen': today, those pictures are prominently displayed on those same walls, and the lady of the house says: 'Don't you agree?—it has a beauty all its own, a sort of classical loveliness. I always adored it, even in the old days when I had to fight pretty hard to justify my taste!' It would probably be unfair, and a little too facile, to say that these ladies are caught out in a piece of hypocrisy, merely because Blanche's paintings have become 'the thing', and that they don't really 'adore' them any more now than they did then. It is probable, on the contrary, that they do, because for a work of art to become 'the thing' implies that a change of vision and of taste has operated over a more or less long period of time, with the result that women of this kind do, at last, come to love the work in question.

On Sundays, Jacques Blanche used to rest, entertain his friends, and 'talk' some of the pages which, later, written down, are here collected into a volume for which he has done me the great honour of asking me to contribute a Preface. Of these *Causeries de Dimanche*, I have often said to my intimates who have read them in some magazine or other, that, in truth, they were the *Causeries de Lundi* of painting. Nor am I unaware what praise such a remark implies. But I have a feeling that,

to some extent, I wronged Jacques Blanche. His fault as a critic is much the same as Sainte-Beuve's. That is to say he has always started from the opposite end from that which was the point of departure for the artist in his effort to achieve self-expression. He has always been tempted to explain the real Fantin, the real Manet, that is to say, the man who can be found only in his work, by referring him to the perishable individual of flesh and blood, like those contemporaries, compounded of many faults, in whom an imprisoned and original personality is for ever at war with the fleshly envelope, and is striving to break away from it, and to find freedom in its work. It is always a matter of amazement to us when we meet, socially, a man whom, hitherto, we have known only through his work, and have to superimpose the one on the other, have to bring the two into harmony, and to find a place for the work (which, when we ever thought about the author at all, we always accommodated with an imaginary but highly appropriate physical parent) in the irreducible *fact* of some habitation of flesh and blood totally different from any we had been led to expect. The task of squaring the circle or of solving a cypher, is child's play compared with *realising*, as the English say, that the gentleman next whom one happens to be seated at luncheon is the author of *Mon Frère Yves* or *La Vie des Abeilles*. Now it is precisely *that* individual, the chain-gang companion to whom the artist is bound for life, who is (at least in part) the subject of Jacques Blanche's essays in portraiture. Sainte-Beuve tried to do the same sort of thing, with the result that a reader, knowing nothing about the literature of the nineteenth century, and attempting to study it in the pages of *Causeries de Lundi*, would discover that there were, at that time in France, a number of remarkable writers, such as Monsieur Royer-Collard, Monsieur le Comte de Molé, Monsieur de Tocqueville, Madame Sand, Béranger, Merimée, and others, and that Sainte-Beuve had known personally several intelligent people who had not been without a certain charm, a certain ephemeral value, but whom it would be foolish to reckon, now, as great artists—men and women praised by him only because they were his friends.



Take that fellow Beyle, for example, who, for some reason best known to himself, assumed the pseudonym of Stendhal. To be sure, he made a number of amusing epigrams, some of which hit their mark—but to pass him off as a novelist—well, what an extraordinary idea! His stories about the Renaissance may have something in them, but *Le Rouge et le Noir*, and other works which are almost unreadable, were clearly the productions of a man with no talent for fiction whatever! No one would have been more surprised than Beyle himself to find such books referred to as masterpieces! Still more surprised would have been Jacquemont, Merimée, le Comte Daru, and all those other folk of assured critical sense, in whose houses Sainte-Beuve was in the habit of meeting ‘that pleasant fellow Beyle’, and for whose views he was prepared, though protesting against the absurd idolatries of the time, to stand sponsor. He has told us that *La Chartreuse de Parme* is ‘not the work of a novelist’. We may well believe him, because he had an advantage denied to us—that of having dined with its author who, delightful companion though he might be, would have been the first to laugh in one’s face had one treated him as a great novelist! Baudelaire, again, was a pleasant enough creature, with much better manners than one might have been led to expect, and not altogether lacking in talent. Still, the idea of his offering himself as a candidate for the Academy was rather too much like a bad joke! . . . The trouble with Sainte-Beuve was that he knew socially a large number of people whom he did not admire. Flaubert was ‘awfully nice’ but *Education Sentimentale* is quite unreadable. True, there are some ‘happy touches’ in *Madame Bovary*: whatever one may think of it, it certainly is a good deal better than Feydan’s stuff.<sup>1</sup>

This is the point of view that Jacques Blanche more than once adopts in the present volume (though not always). It amuses him to shock the admirers of Manet by telling them that ‘the great revolutionary, hankered after decorations and titles and those of his own work by trying to persuade my great friend,

<sup>1</sup> A minor French novelist of the nineteenth century (*Translator*)

Madeleine Lemaire, that he himself is a serious competitor of Chaplin, has always worked with an eye to the smart picture-shows, and has paid considerably more attention to Roll<sup>1</sup> than to Manet, Renoir or Degas. All things considered (for a painter's views on other painters can never help but be intensely interesting) such a point of view differs very little from that of the lady who says: 'I can tell you all you want to know about Jacques Blanche. He used to dine at my house every Tuesday. You can take my word for it that nobody ever treated him seriously as a painter. His one ambition was to be a popular man-about-town.'

That may be true about one side of Jacques Blanche, but it leaves out the essentials. The point of view too often adopted by Sainte-Beuve, and occasionally by Jacques Blanche, is not the genuine point of view of Art. But it is the point of view of History, and that is what gives it great interest. But there is this difference, that, whereas Sainte-Beuve's attitude was a permanent part of his make-up, so that he often classed the writers of his day much as Madame de Boigne or the Duchesse de Broglie might have done their own contemporaries, Jacques Blanche's is an affair of a few passing moments only. It amuses him to talk like that, helps him to sharpen his contrasts and to give liveliness to his scene. But, actually, the painters and the writers whom he loves are those who, from the first, were destined for greatness. He saw the day of their success long before it dawned, which means that his critical judgments will remain true judgments, and that this book about painters written by a painter who saw them at work, can describe the way in which they set their palettes, and the subtle changes wrought by time on their canvases (in this way, giving us versions of their masterpieces as thrilling as Morgen's description of Leonardo's *Last Supper* before deterioration set in), this book by a painter who is also a writer of astonishing talent—is, by reason of this duality, something quite unique. What about Fromentin? I hear somebody say. Well, let us

<sup>2</sup> A French historical and *genre* painter of the nineteenth century  
(Translator)



ignore Fromentin the painter, and at least admit that the author of *Maîtres d'Autrefois*, with his elegant turns of phrase in the manner of George Sand (to say nothing of Jules Sandeau) is much inferior to the author of *Maîtres de Jadis et de Naguère*. The superiority of Jacques Blanche—and this is the really interesting point for his readers—lies in the fact that he is a 'connoisseur of painting'. It should not be forgotten that in *Maîtres d'Autrefois*, though it was written several centuries after the painters of the Dutch School had been dead, Vermeer of Delft, the greatest of them all, *is not so much as mentioned*, whereas Jacques Blanche, like Jean Cocteau, does full justice to the great, the admirable, Picasso, who, in fact, has concentrated all Cocteau's features in a portrait of such noble rigidity that, when I look at it, even the most charming Carpaccios in Venice are inclined to take second place in my memory.

What revelations we have here of the way in which Whistler, Ricard, Fantin and Manet set their palettes! Probably no one but Blanche could have made them: but he does more. He brings back to the frail actuality of life, for one brief moment, as he knew them, the material features of many pictures: the table at which we see the two lovers sitting in *Le Père Lathuile*, the mirror at Nana's feet, the very oaken table on which the fruit and flowers painted by Fantin lived out their short existence, the black velvet curtain in front of which Whistler posed his model. It is as though we had made the acquaintance of the woman from whom Flaubert drew Madame Bovary, or Stendhal La Sanseverina. We find ourselves getting to know all those furnishings of the studio which we first saw in the timeless beauty of a masterpiece, each in the form given to it 'in eternity'. And this journey back into the past on which Blanche takes us, is not only thrilling; it is inexhaustibly instructive, demonstrating, as it does, the absurdity of certain formulæ in obedience to which we have been taught to admire great masterpieces for qualities the very reverse of those that they actually possess. (Contrast Blanche's Manet with the unreal Manet shown us by Zola ('window thrown open on to Nature')). Nevertheless, I cannot help finding this historical point of view

rather shocking insofar as with Blanche, as with Sainte-Beuve, it tends to give too much importance to the period at which certain pictures were painted, and to the models who sat for them. There may, I admit, be a not unpleasing fetishism in the belief that a considerable part of Beauty lies outside ourselves, and that we play no part in creating it. This is not the place for me to discuss such problems of doctrine. But I am not sufficiently a materialist to hold that the fashions of Fantin's day made it easier to paint beautiful portraits, that Manet's Paris was more picturesque than our own, or that the fairy-like loveliness of London accounts for at least one half of Whistler's genius.

In certain of the portraits given by Blanche in this volume there is some ground for the charge made against him of 'wickedness'. The pictures of one or two painters, of Fantin, for instance, raise a smile. But surely a portrait of this kind, brimming with truth, originality and life, does more honour to the vanished master (in spite of an appearance of irreverence that does not really disguise the writer's genuine sympathy) than pages of lyrical praise by critics who know nothing whatever about art? Do they, in fact, do more for Fantin, do they give a greater interest or an intenser feeling of life to his memory, than does Blanche when he displays before us so many priceless details relative to Fantin's studio or to Manet's? I admit that there may be nothing 'pleasing' in the ordinary, flat sense of the word in such a description as this, for instance: 'Fantin was touchingly inadequate when it came to arranging the background of a room or choosing a chair. This scrupulous realist would pin a piece of grey material behind his model or put up a brown paper screen to represent the panelling of a drawing room. His studio was about as subtly lit as that of an old-fashioned photographer. His laziness, his hatred of moving, still further constrained him. He was greatly incommoded by the huge skylight which had the effect of filling the whole room with a diffused light, and flattening everybody in it. His Dubourg Family looks to me just as though Monsieur Nadar<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> One of the earliest photographers, and a friend of Henri Mürger  
(Translator)



had asked the good folk to come for a sitting straight from church, in their stiff Sunday clothes.' If one still played that ridiculous game of 'Imaginary Sayings' which is no longer popular except in girls' schools—the sort of thing, I mean, in which Plante writes from the the next world to give his opinion on the latest play of some living dramatist—one might indulge the fancy of a letter of grateful thanks called forth from Fantin by the fact that when Blanche speaks of him, though the description may bring a smile to the lips of the reader, it is the kind of respectful smile in which one indulges when one looks at Chardin's self-portrait where the painter is shown wearing a sort of lampshade on his head. One would point out to the player that he must make it clear in the letter that Fantin is thanking Blanche for having prolonged what of all things is most precious to the dead—his life. Besides, has not Blanche said: 'The opinions of critics and friends seem to me to be rarely just, usually exaggerated, and frequently bad. To judge is a besetting need of my nature. No considerations of friendship, however warm, have ever made me alter my views. One must say what one thinks. Such is my conception of honesty in a time of quarrels and universal troubles. I recognise only one emotional reaction—passionate admiration. But if one happens to have a high ideal of beauty, the opportunities for admiring one's contemporaries are limited. If I have hurt or shocked some of my companions along the road of life, I am sorry. But I take comfort in the attitude of the more judicial among them, for, believe it or not, there *are* people who have seen what I was after, and who bear me no ill will.'

And yet, when he feels free to admire, with what warmth does he express himself! It is a pleasure for me to find in the present volume (which is only the first of a series) enthusiastic praise given to a man whom I admire and love above all others—José-Maria Sert. What a sense of delight, what sincerity, animates the pages in which Blanche compares him to Michaelangelo and Tintoretto! The odd thing is that I might have lived in a different period to Sert, or in the same, and yet never have known him. But, as things have turned out,

we do know one another. He is aware of my admiration for him, and does not conceal a fellow feeling for me. But each time that one of his magnificent beauties starts, under good escort, on a journey, regretting, perhaps, in the thought of predestined exile, the Rue Barbey-de-Jouy, and fated to live sequestered in some Palace or some Church of Spain, or merely to wander the seas like the Oceanides, I, chained fondly to my rock, can never see the banished loveliness before her departure. There are in life other incompatibilities than those of time and space. Ill Fortune takes many strange forms, all of which would make fitting themes for the novelist.

Shall I say that in this book—so full of concentrated, original and creative truth, which no one but Blanche could have written—he never, for all his impartiality, expresses preferences with which I am out of sympathy? To make any such statement would be untrue. Were the venerable Dr Blanche permitted to revisit this earth, he would be delighted, but not a little surprised, to hear his 'Jacques' spoken of as being a greater painter than the academicians whom *he* had known. For, like all parents, even the most intelligent, he must sometimes have said of his son very much what Madame Manet said of hers: 'He did a lovely copy of Tintoretto's *Virgin with the Rabbit*. You must come and see it. It's beautifully done, which shows that he *can* paint differently. But what can you expect, with the kind of people he has round him?' But Dr Blanche would be still more amazed to find how closely, in the things that matter, his son Jacques Emile resembles him, and carries on the paternal tradition. It is the tragedy of all family disagreements, that it is only when we are at odds with our relations that we show the extent to which we share and intensify their characteristics and their tastes. It is always the old uncle who thinks he ought to give a word of advice to his nephew, who has been guilty in his own youth of the same foolish conduct, and in a precisely similar way, though he always firmly believes that 'it wasn't at all the same thing'. Similarly, the champions of Delacroix, when they later waxed indignant over Manet, over the Impressionists, over the Cubists,



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always believed that it wasn't 'at all the same thing'. Now, in two of the best pieces of the present collection, the one dealing with the Rouart sale, and the essay on Cézanne, one cannot help noticing the difference between the Jacques Blanche of today and the Jacques Blanche of 1891, or thereabouts, for he pushes his traditionalism so far as to make no bones about concealing his tolerance, nay, his liking, for the house in which Monsieur Rouart accumulated his collection of masterpieces.

The rooms, so frankly Second Empire in taste, showed complete unconcern for the standards of interior decoration now in fashion. I once took Fritz Thaulow to see them. He regards himself as being in the forefront of modern taste, and has built up from elements derived from Berlin, Munich and Copenhagen, a conception of furnishing of which the rather pathetic audacities were revealed to the world in the Autumn Salon of 1912. In the matter of painting, he was familiar only with such pictures as were shown there. Consequently, where anything more than mere friendliness or cordiality was concerned, he could be something of an embarrassment.

'But you wouldn't *really* like to live in a house like this, would you, Blanche? You say that Monsieur Rouart was a man of taste, but just *look* at the furniture, at the hangings! It's exactly like a dentist's waiting room! . . . The walls are plum coloured, the upholstering chocolate . . . and those *awful* gilded lampstands! No, Blanche, it's nothing but a provincial interior, and, what's more, a provincial interior of the time of Louis Phillippe . . . Degas's copy of the *Rape of the Sabines*, and Delacroix's *Poet*, caused his bitterness to overflow: 'If that's painting, I might as well go and hang myself! It's all just a brown mess!' . . .

Reading this account, one feels that, in his heart of hearts, Jacques Blanche really prefers that kind of painting to the *chalky* compositions of the Impressionists. In Manet it is not

the influence of Monet—already hopelessly old-fashioned, according to him—(my own personal taste, if I knew anything about painting, would lead me to exactly the opposite conclusion, and I have seen at Gaston Gallimard's a Monet which I hold to be the finest Manet to be found anywhere), but the influence of Goya that he loves, because, as he maintains, it rejuvenates Manet much as 'Musset was rejuvenated by Shakespeare'. Blanche has as little liking for the literary theories of the critics as he has for their taste in decoration.

Monsieur Charles Morice, in a questionnaire addressed to my colleagues, once asked what contribution Fantin had made, what, precisely, it was that had passed with him into the tomb. Such a question is somewhat disconcerting. It could have been asked only by a man of letters, for to the literary mind the intellectual operations of the painter are always a closed book. Pictorial invention is often revealed by nothing more than tone relations, the juxtaposition of two values, or even by the way of laying on the pigment, of drawing it across the canvas. Those who are not sensitive to technique should have nothing to do with the plastic arts, because their facile intelligences are incapable of recognising a painter when they see one.

I should say that Jacques Blanche ought to be in whole-hearted agreement with the maxim enunciated by Maurice Denis (to whom, as to Vuillard, I am tempted to say that he is less than fair), that 'one should always remember that a picture, apart from the fact that it may be *about* a charger, a nude woman or some form of anecdote, is essentially a flat surface covered with colours arranged in a certain way.' If Jacques Blanche protests against this saying it is from an excess of his French traditionalism. To show what I mean, let me end by quoting a magnificent passage from his pen written to glorify the old masters of France.

I must raise my voice against the tiny place accorded by



## PREFACE TO PROPOS DE PEINTRE

Monsieur Denis to that sensibility, that emotionalism, which is the fine flower of intelligence, to that power of moving us which was the possession of Delacroix, of Millet and of Corot, those colossi of the nineteenth century. The condemnation of realism and the copying of nature, so dear to our neo-Impressionists, amounts, fundamentally, to no more than the adoption of intellectual formulæ to the detriment of human feeling and sensitiveness, to the championing of a purely decorative form of art which differs very little from that of Persia or of China. The adoption of such a standard would mean the end of pictorial art as it has been understood by the men of our race . . . . Fritz Thaulow never grew weary of exercising his sarcasm at the expense of a certain production of Corot which, beneath a divine blue August sky, lights with an eternal sunbeam the study in which I am writing these lines . . . . It consists of a sky as luminous, as translucent as anything in Fra Angelico, made of one knows not what precious material, perhaps of turquoise. Beneath this immaculate blue, a faint haze of light transforms into the likeness of a casket made of many kinds of gold, the roofs and gables of some perfectly ordinary barrack-like building. A few figures are seated or shown walking in the Square of a provincial town, streaked with long and limpid shadows. I judge all so-called connoisseurs by their attitude to this Corot of mine. Only the Dutch, and the French painters of the time of the brothers Rouart, knew how to set that particular chord vibrating. It is music characteristically French, light, melodious, but so discreet, so intimate, that it runs the risk of being ignored. It was this 'chamber music' that sounded with so true a note in the house of the Rue de Lisbonne.

It seems to me that such passages—of which I have given only this one excerpt, but which the reader will find complete in the present volume—not only compel our admiration of Jacques Blanche the writer, and set it on a level with our

## MARCEL PROUST

respect for him as a painter, but awaken in us a feeling of love. Take, for example, the end of his essay on Millet, which shall be also the end of this Preface.

For the Frenchman of the West, delighting in the life of the countryside, there is not a minute of the day, not a moment of each season, not a gesture, not a face of a Normandy peasant, not a tree, a hedge, a farm implement, but gains in beauty from the holy unction, the noble grandeur which J. F. Millet has imparted to them . . . So long as the dusk of evening can stir our emotion, Millet's paintings will remain beyond criticism. His work is as touching as his life, for it is a synthesis, not only of his models, close though they were to nature, but of Nature herself.



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